

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times: Assessing the buffering effect of a realistic orientation on relationship satisfaction in newly cohabitating couples.

by

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**Abstract**

People spend a considerable amount of time thinking about their future. When doing so they likely anticipate a wide variety of outcomes; some positive, some negative. Past research suggests anticipating both positive and negative outcomes (termed a ‘realistic orientation’) is more adaptive than simply considering positive outcomes (termed a ‘positive orientation’) as the individual should be less blindsided if setbacks occur. This thesis examined whether a realistic orientation would be protective against unexpected challenges and unmet expectations during a time of transition for romantic partners (i.e., cohabitation). In Studies 1 ( $n = 86$ ) and 2 ( $n = 79$ ), individuals who were in a romantic relationship were invited to complete an orientation to cohabitation scale as well as scales measuring defensive pessimism, hope, and optimism (in Study II only). Results showed that the orientation to cohabitation scale had good reliability and discriminant validity. In Study 3, individuals who were in a romantic relationship and planning on moving in with their partner for the first time were invited to participate. Study III had three waves of data collection: four to eight weeks prior to moving in together ( $n = 290$ ); 12 weeks after moving in together ( $n = 176$ ); and 24 weeks after moving in together ( $n = 171$ ). The data were analyzed using hierarchical linear modelling. The results showed that (a) orientation did not buffer the negative effects of unmet expectations. When expectations were unmet relationship satisfaction decreased over time for both positively and realistically oriented participants; (b) when expectations were met realistically oriented participants reported an increase in commitment where positively oriented participants did not; (c) unexpected challenges did not influence relationship satisfaction or commitment. The findings suggest unmet expectations can negatively influence relationship satisfaction over time, regardless of orientation. Additionally, the findings suggest that a realistic orientation is as adaptive as a positive orientation. It appears that considering negative possibilities is not necessarily harmful for one’s relationship.

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It was the best of times, it was the worst of times: The buffering effect of a realistic orientation on relationship satisfaction in newly cohabitating couples.

As human beings, one of our defining features is our ability to think about the future.

Some, in fact, have suggested that the main purpose of human intelligence is to allow us to form anticipations (Hawkins & Blakeslee, 2005). Thinking about the future is something we appear to do fairly often throughout a typical day (Jason, Schade, Furo, Reichler, & Brickman, 1989; Leary, 2004). As graduation from university approaches a student may anticipate landing a job, or making their first big purchase as a post-graduate. Parents-to-be may anticipate holding their newborn, late night feedings, and changing diapers. Couples moving in together may imagine sitting with their partner on the couch with a glass of wine and good conversation or cleaning up after their partner more often than they should. These anticipations allow people to form ideas of what their future might be like. This in turn allows people to prepare for and set expectations for the future.

Past research suggests that these anticipations and expectations have implications for adjustment in the face of unexpected challenges (e.g., during the transition to motherhood; Churchill & Davis, 2010). In this thesis, I will add to the body of research in that area (i.e., anticipations and adjustment) and explore the role anticipations play in relationships, and more specifically, the transition to cohabitation within a romantic relationship. I will explore how individuals' anticipations influence how they respond to unmet expectations and unexpected challenges that arise as they move in with their romantic partner and how these occurrences influence change in relationship satisfaction and commitment over time.

### Defining Anticipations

The concept of anticipations, and its role in predicting behaviour, stems from George Kelly's (1955) work on personal constructs. Personal Constructs Theory (PCT) posits that individuals develop anticipations about their future based on their perceptions of reality and personal constructs (ways of viewing the world). People formulate these anticipations so that they can develop a clearer representation of what their future may hold, and are therefore able to turn the chaos of life into something more understandable and predictable. According to PCT, this predictability is desirable because it gives people cues as to how to act and what to expect in concrete contexts. The way in which people construct their reality and subsequently anticipate future events (i.e., the valence and complexity of their anticipations) may influence their psychological reactions to adverse outcomes. When an experience runs counter to one's personal constructs, one is motivated to revise the construct to accommodate the new experience. Events 'make sense' to the extent that they can be accommodated within one's system of personal constructs. When an event does not fit easily into one's current or revised constructs it can cause distress.

People differ in the personal constructs they develop for anticipated events. For some people and for some contexts, anticipations may be overwhelmingly positive: thinking about an upcoming vacation, one may imagine great weather, fun times, and great food. Such a one-sided view may set one up for disappointment as one's experience on the vacation may not be consistent with the vacation personal construct one has established. For others, anticipations may be overwhelmingly negative: thinking about a visit to the dentist may evoke thoughts of needles, pain, and discomfort. Such a one-sided view may result in feelings of relief when the visit does not turn out as badly as anticipated; however, it may be more difficult to accommodate positive

outcomes into their personal construct leading to continued dissatisfaction. Personal constructs may be most efficient and adaptive when they include a mix of positive and negative anticipations.

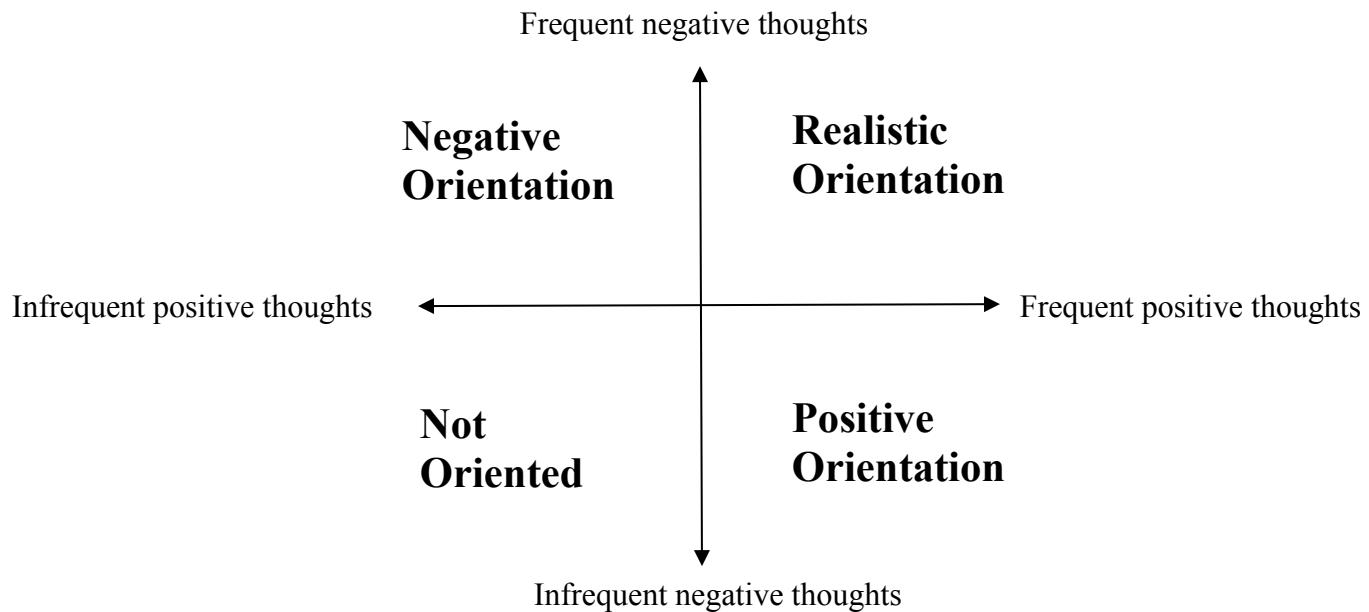
*What is an anticipation?*

An anticipation is a distinct imagined outcome or possibility for a specific upcoming event or situation. That is, as we think about a future event we develop a series of imagined scenarios that illustrate what we believe could occur; these scenarios are anticipations. Anticipations, as I define them, are akin to the ‘cues’ used to form predictions in forecasting theory (Critcher & Rosenzwig, 2014) or ‘possible selves’ defined by Markus and Nurius (1986). For example, if thinking about travelling to the leaning tower of Pisa, one may imagine large crowds and long waits, no crowds or lines at all, the tower to be awe inspiring, or the tower to be less majestic than pictured. One might anticipate rain, panhandlers, pick-pockets, and the types of cafes and bistros around the square. All of these thoughts fall under the category of anticipations. Anticipations can be complementary, in that a set of anticipations may build off one another or be similar in theme (e.g., no crowds and no lines), or contradictory, in that they could not occur simultaneously (e.g., pleasant weather, horrible weather). Anticipations can be fantasy-like and fleeting (e.g., the thought of meeting someone cute on the tour bus) or concrete and specific (e.g., anticipating an hour long wait to enter a popular tourist attraction).

An important dimension of anticipations is their valence; some anticipations describe a desired state or outcome whereas others describe a state or outcome that is undesired. The valence of one’s anticipations appears to be particularly important because of how it influences one’s expectations and reactions. As one develops a set of anticipations, the collective valence of those thoughts (compared to the complexity or frequency) influences whether one sets low or

high expectations. For example, if the predominant valence of one's anticipations regarding an upcoming test is negative, one is likely to set low expectations (i.e., expect to do poorly). If the predominant valence of one's anticipations about an upcoming test is positive then one's expectation will likely be high (i.e., expect to do well). To the extent that one imagines or anticipates a mix of both positive and negative scenarios (but weights a positive scenario as most likely), the expectation is also likely to be high. The valence of one's anticipations, and in particular the frequency of both positive and negative anticipations, may also predict how one reacts to unexpected outcomes. Regardless of the expectation one sets (i.e., what one believes *will* happen), anticipations indicate what one thinks *might* happen (indicating that one should not be overly surprised if one of the considered outcomes occurred). If one's set of anticipations contains both positive and negative anticipations then one is less likely to be shocked should one of the considered negative outcomes occur. Additionally, because the outcome was considered as a possibility it should be easier to work into one's personal construct which would make adapting to the outcome easier. Thus, the valence of one's individual anticipations as well as one's overall set of anticipations is particularly important.

For some, anticipations for a particular event or experience may be overwhelmingly positive, featuring images of goal achievement, happiness, and success (termed 'positively-oriented'); for others, anticipations for a particular event or experience are rife with images of impending difficulty and disaster (termed 'negatively-oriented'). Some individuals approach the impending event giving little thought at all to the possible outcomes (termed 'not oriented'). Last, many individuals entertain a mix of both positively- and negatively-valenced anticipations: they imagine the possibility of success yet also consider what might go wrong (termed 'realistically-oriented'; see Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Frequency of positive and negative thoughts and corresponding orientation

Past research has indicated that the frequency with which people anticipate positive states or outcomes may be relatively independent of the frequency with which they anticipate negative states or outcomes. For instance, a study by Churchill and Davis (2010) examining the anticipations of first time expectant mothers found that the frequency of positive anticipations and the frequency of negative anticipations were not significantly correlated. The absence of a negative relationship between the dimensions provides evidence that an individual does not necessarily anticipate few negative thoughts if they anticipate many positive ones and vice versa. These findings also suggest that there is a group of individuals who anticipate a high number of both positive and negative outcomes.

It is important to emphasize that while those who are realistically-oriented consider negative possibilities, they do not necessarily expect these possibilities to come to pass; they are not pessimistic. In my Master's thesis, I assessed the relation between students' anticipations regarding test-taking (e.g., 'the test being much harder than one anticipated' or 'how good it will feel to do well on the test') and their expectations for performance on an upcoming task (Frank,

2012). Those with a realistic orientation and those with a positive orientation set similar performance-based expectations which were higher than expectations made by negatively-oriented participants. Thus, those with a realistic orientation, although anticipating the possibility of failure or potential challenges, may still be considered optimistic. Colloquially, those with a realistic set of anticipations may be regarded as “hoping for the best while planning for the worst”.

Although consideration of negative outcomes or experiences may create some anxiety in the anticipatory period, such thoughts (if combined with the consideration of positive or desired outcomes or experiences) may be more adaptive in the long run, at least compared to focusing predominantly on positive outcomes. Sewell (2003) postulated that individuals who do not give thought to possible negative outcomes (e.g., failure, challenges, roadblocks) have difficulty adjusting when problems arise. Sewell suggests that without considering possible failure no alternate routes to success are formed. Without a ‘Plan B’, individuals may feel blindsided when ‘Plan A’ does not result in success. Recently, Baumeister, Vohs, and Oettingen (2016), have also emphasized the importance of considering both positive and negative outcomes in relation to the future using a process called pragmatic prospection. Pragmatic prospection is described as a way of thinking of the future that motivates actions that help to produce desired outcomes (i.e., achieve goals). The process of pragmatic prospection involves two stages: first the individual identifies a goal and imagines the positive outcome(s), and then the individual thinks about possible obstacles and potential issues that might arise as they approach that goal. Baumeister and colleagues (2016) suggest that for pragmatic prospection to be effective, prospection must include both stages of thinking: goal attainment and obstacles (i.e., positive thoughts and negative thoughts). They argue that switching between goal attainment (i.e., positive thoughts or

optimism) and obstacles (i.e., negative thoughts or pessimism) is important as the positive thoughts push the individual towards their goal, and the negative thoughts prepare the individual for potential challenges. Baumeister and colleagues (2016) describe their process as approaching a cautious realism, and indeed this pattern of thoughts is similar to the thoughts of someone with a realistic orientation. Much like a realistic orientation the process of pragmatic prospection considers the future as a wide set of possibilities; some positive, some negative. What differentiates the processes of pragmatic prospection from a realistic orientation is that whereas pragmatic prospection argues an order to the thinking process (i.e., positive thoughts first, negative thoughts second, and then rotation between the two), a realistic orientation has no defined order. Those who are realistically oriented may consider negative possibilities before positive possibilities, or they may consider positive and negative possibilities concurrently.

There is research to suggest that failure to consider negative possible outcomes may be hazardous. Studies that focus on personal control have found that when people assess their vulnerability to negative outcomes as low (which is linked to high levels of perceived control), they have more difficulty adapting if or when that negative outcome occurs (see Perloff, 1983 for review). For example, one study examining victims of sexual assault found that women with more perceived control (i.e., perceived their vulnerability to attack was low) had a harder time recovering from their sexual assault than women who perceived their vulnerability as higher (Scheppele & Bart, 1983). Anticipating a range of possible scenarios for an important event is likely advantageous to the extent that the positively-valenced thoughts maintain hope and negatively-valenced thoughts help one prepare for the possibility of failure or disappointment.

When thinking of preparing for disappointment or potential challenges one may draw parallels between a realistic orientation and proactive coping. In some ways possessing a realistic

orientation could be seen as a type of proactive coping. Where other methods of coping are seen as being reactive, in that coping occurs after a stressful event, proactive coping is future oriented and occurs in the anticipation of stressors (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997). One engages in proactive coping (which can involve considering possible negative outcomes) to attenuate the effect of future stress in relation to an upcoming challenge (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997). For example, a graduate student may recognize that their funding ends after this academic year and put money aside in order to lessen the future strain of reduced resources. In this way, some consider proactive coping to relate to goal management instead of risk management (Greenglass, 2002). Certainly, some aspects of proactive coping, such as considering possible outcomes of problems or challenges, are similar to a realistic orientation but there are key distinctions. First, those who engage in proactive coping are identifying and preparing for events that may be challenging or stressful whereas those with a realistic orientation consider outcomes for any upcoming personally relevant events, not just those that may be particularly challenging or stressful. Second, individuals engaging in proactive coping are motivated to consider outcomes in order to engage in behaviours to reduce stress associated with an upcoming event. Those who are realistically oriented are motivated to consider negative possibilities in order to have a more complex and clear idea of what their future may hold. Thus, they are not only motivated to consider these outcomes so that they may prepare for their eventuality (especially since they may consider many conflicting possibilities that could not occur concurrently). That is not to say that those with a realistic orientation will not prepare for a possible negative outcome, but that they are not only motivated to consider negative outcomes for that purpose. The adaptive nature of a realistic orientation does not come from preparing for negative outcomes so much as from developing full well-rounded personal constructs. By having

well-rounded constructs those with a realistic orientation are better able to accommodate unexpected (but considered) outcomes in to their system of personal constructs where those who consider predominantly positive or predominantly negative outcomes may have more difficulty. As mentioned previously, if an event cannot be easily accommodated into one's current or revised constructs it may lead to distress.

Although context-specific, the proportion, or relative frequency, of positive and negative anticipations tends to be somewhat stable over time (e.g., the tendency to anticipate predominantly positive scenarios). Assessing anticipations regarding university life among first year university students, Rainey (2008) demonstrated fairly high test-retest correlations across four months between the positive and negative subscales of an orientation to university scale ( $r = .56$  for positive thoughts,  $r = .61$  for negative thoughts). Within contexts, however; shifts in anticipations do occur; as time passes one may reconsider past anticipations and decide they are no longer a possibility, or new information may result in new anticipations. Trope and Liberman (2003) suggested that as the anticipated event gets closer, the pool of anticipations shifts from being more idealistic (more positive than negative scenarios) to more 'realistic' (incorporates more negative possibilities). Illustrating this, a study by Shepperd, Ouellette, and Fernandez (1996) found that as graduation approached students lowered their estimates of their post-graduation salary. Whereas the valence of anticipations may be somewhat stable over time, anticipations may change as new information comes to light.

### ***Anticipations and Expectations***

Anticipations are similar in nature but distinct from expectations. Where anticipations are any and all possibilities one considers, expectations have a probability attached to them. So while one may anticipate the possibility of getting food poisoning while dining on Italian cuisine, given the culinary abilities of the staff at the restaurant one intends to patronize, the probability of such

an event is probably quite low. One therefore may not expect to get food poisoning, but may note where the washrooms are upon entering the restaurant. While one can develop many anticipations, related anticipations distil into a limited set of expectations. It is likely that anticipations related by a single dimension (e.g., all weather-related anticipations for one's day trip to Gatineau Park) are considered and then distilled down into a singular expectation (e.g., I expect it will be cloudy, but not rain). One might consider the possibility that an upcoming meal will be amazing or disappointing (both anticipations are related to meal quality); however, one presumably does not simultaneously expect both. Thus, an expectation is formed by weighing the related anticipations. Anticipations may therefore be considered a precondition of expectations insofar as expectations are anticipations weighted by perceived likelihood of occurrence. There have been studies that have assessed the role anticipations (although not necessarily by that name) play in influencing expectations (e.g., Asliturk, 2011; Frank, 2012; Hoch, 1985). Sherman, Skov, Hervitz, and Stock (1981) conducted a study assessing whether directed anticipations prior to a task would influence expectations. Subjects not assigned to the control group were instructed to either anticipate and explain hypothetical success, or anticipate and explain hypothetical failure, on an upcoming anagram task after which they set explicit expectations for the task. Results showed that participants who had anticipated and explained hypothetical success expected to do better than those in the control group as well as those who had explained hypothetical failure. Those who anticipated and explained negative outcomes expected to do worse than the control group. When anticipations are manipulated, the condition resembling a positive orientation set higher expectations, and the condition resembling a negative orientation set lower expectations. Using the control group as a comparison, this study

illustrates that anticipations (and in particular their valance) can have a significant influence on one's expectations.

Although anticipations and expectations are linked, research has provided evidence that they are distinct constructs with unique influences on behaviour. A series of studies conducted by Oettingen and colleagues highlights this distinction by comparing the effects of people's fantasies/thoughts versus their expectations in predicting goal achievement across various situations (e.g., Oettingen, Losert, Wood, Kazak, & Nathanson, 1995; Oettingen & Mayer, 2002; Oettingen & Wadden, 1991). For example, prior to beginning a weight loss program, women in one study were asked to set an expectation for weight loss (i.e., set a weight loss goal) as well as complete four future hypothetical vignettes that might take place after their expected weight loss (e.g., "Tonight you have plans to go out with an old friend whom you have not seen in about a year. As you wait for your friend to arrive you imagine..."). Whereas women who set high expectations (i.e., predicted more weight loss) lost significantly more weight than women who set low expectations, women who had overly positive anticipations (i.e., overly positive hypothetical situations) lost significantly less weight than those who had more balanced (i.e., less positive) anticipations. This same pattern was replicated in other studies looking at job success, dating, and recovery from acute illness (Oettingen et al., 1995). The findings of these studies support the idea that anticipations and expectations are discrete constructs with unique influences on goal attainment. More specifically, these findings suggest that whereas setting high expectations for oneself can be adaptive, preparing for upcoming challenges by predominantly considering positive outcomes may lead to suboptimal results.

One area in which anticipations may play an important role is in relationships, and particularly, relationships during times of transition. Currently, there is no research that examines

the influence or role anticipations play in perceptions of and expectations regarding relationships. As humans, we have a fundamental need to belong in groups and to form relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Identifying factors that can promote well-being within one's relationships may also influence one's overall well-being.

## Romantic Relationships

### ***Need to belong***

“No man is an island”, immortal words written by John Donne (1624/1975 p. 108), suggest that people need others in their lives. As a social species, humans have a fundamental need to belong to social groups (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), people have an evolutionary drive to form bonds with other people and to develop both friendships and romantic relationships. There have been many documented benefits associated with social and romantic relationships. Among them, social and romantic relationships have been found to predict better health (Sarason, Sarason, & Gurung, 1997) and happiness (Demir, 2010). In addition, forming bonds with others can protect individuals against psychological threats (Reddy, 2011). An inability to meet this need to belong however, (e.g., through rejection) is linked to a variety of negative outcomes including antisocial behaviour (see Gere & MacDonald, 2010), depression (Nolan, Flynn, & Garber, 2003), sadness, anxiety, and loneliness (see Leary, Koch, & Hechenbleikner, 2001 for review). Given these findings it appears that relationships are important for both physical and psychological health.

As in other areas of their lives, most people are generally optimistic about their relationships (e.g., identifying various components of the relationship, such as communication, as being better than the average relationship; Buunk, Oldersma, & De Dreu, 2001; Rusbult, Van Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, Verette, 2000). As previously discussed, anticipating a future too

rosy (by anticipating a broad spectrum of positive possibilities but few negative ones) can lead to difficulties in adjustment when challenges or setbacks arise. A study conducted by Neff and Geers (2013) found that compared to general optimism, relationship-specific optimism (i.e., the belief that you and your partner are at lower than average risk for experiencing aversive relationship events such as stagnation) predicted steeper declines in marital well-being over time. Neff and Geers suggested that compared to general optimism relationship-specific optimism is more concrete and therefore the discrepancy between one's expectations within the relationship and one's actual experiences is easier to identify. These perceived discrepancies between one's expectations for the relationship and the reality that emerges over time contribute to the decline in relationship satisfaction. Neff and Geers' findings suggest that being overly optimistic about one's relationship may be an indirect predictor of lowered relationship satisfaction. Instead of being overly optimistic about one's relationship it may be more adaptive to accurately perceive the reality of one's relationship. Adopting a realistic orientation may reduce this optimistic bias, which in turn may contribute to relational well-being.

### ***Relationship Satisfaction***

Given the positive associations between forming relationships and personal well-being, identifying factors that can maintain high quality relationships through relationship satisfaction may be important. One of the most significant predictors of relationship satisfaction is a discrepancy between one's expectations and reality. Michalos (1986) argued that when people's expectations or anticipations do not line up with their perception of reality, this gap can lead to dissatisfaction, unhappiness, or negative affect. Research shows that when one's expectations are consistent with one's experiences in the relationship, one tends to report higher levels of relationship satisfaction (e.g., Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000). That is to say, if one's

expectations are met within the relationship, one is more satisfied. A study conducted by Dainton (2000) assessed the relationship between expectancy fulfilment for the partner's use of relationship maintenance strategies (behaviours used to maintain or increase satisfaction; e.g., buying one's partner flowers) and one's satisfaction in the relationship and found that the smaller the discrepancy between expected and actual use of relationship maintenance strategies the higher the reported relationship satisfaction. Examining the link between age and marital satisfaction Li and Fung (2011) found that as individuals age they lower their expectations about their partner, which reduces discrepancies between expectations and reality. In their study, this reduction in the discrepancy between expectations and perceived reality predicted higher relationship satisfaction.

Related research has examined the link between reality and one's relationship/partner ideals within one's relationship. Although ideals and expectations are often distinct, there are times when ideals and expectations may coincide. Ruvolo and Veroff (1997) suggest that one such time is at marriage or when couples move in together (i.e., during times of positive transition). A study by Ruvolo and Veroff (1997) found that discrepancies between one's ideals and reality predicted well-being one year into marriage such that larger discrepancies predicted lower levels of well-being. Thus, our expectations or ideals in relation to reality play a role in predicting satisfaction within one's relationship. Factors that predict adjustment following unmet expectations may also be particularly important for relationship satisfaction.

### **Anticipations, Transitions, & Cohabitation**

Whether one is transitioning into a new job, a new home, or a new stage in one's relationship, transitions are a natural part of life. Regardless of whether the transition was self-initiated (e.g., moving in with a partner) or imposed on the individual (e.g., the loss of a job),

individuals must adapt to the changes associated with the transition. Although there has been research conducted on other types of transitions (e.g., transition to retirement, transition to university) it appears that relationships research has yet to include cohabitation as a significant stage or transition period, focusing almost completely on dating, pre-marriage, early marriage, and parenting. I have found no research that has assessed factors that influence adaptation to cohabitation or the extent to which adaptation to the transition influences long-term relationship satisfaction. Yet cohabitation is an increasingly popular option among dating couples; a growing proportion of couples are now choosing to cohabit prior to (or as an alternative to) marriage. In Canada the number of couples cohabitating has gone up significantly from 2001 to 2011 with an increase of over 850,000 individuals cohabitating with their romantic partner (for a total of 3.2 million cohabitating but unmarried individuals; Statistics Canada, 2011). In addition, although early research demonstrated a link between cohabitation before marriage and low marital relationship quality and divorce (e.g., Kamp Dush, Cohan, & Amato, 2003; Lillard, Brien, & Waite, 1995), more recent research suggests that once socio-demographic variables and pre-marital relationship characteristics are controlled for the link between pre-marital cohabitation and marital relationship quality is no longer significant (Brown, Sanchez, Nock, & Wright, 2006; Manning & Cohen, 2012). These findings suggest that the act of cohabitating with one's partner before marriage does not negatively influence one's martial satisfaction as previously thought.

Studies that have examined changes in relationship satisfaction during times of transition (e.g., moving in together or marriage) suggest that the process of transitioning has a significant influence on relationship satisfaction. Some research suggests following a transition (e.g., moving in together or marriage), couples experience a decline in relationship satisfaction. For

example, one longitudinal study of dating couples transitioning into cohabitation observed a general increase in relationship quality leading up to the transition but a decrease in relationship quality after moving in together (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2012)<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, they found this decline in relationship satisfaction occurred in conjunction with a significant increase in negative communication indicating that transitions (and in particular cohabitation) may negatively influence one's relationship. However, other research examining relationship satisfaction during transitions (e.g., marriage) has suggested only some individuals experience a decline in satisfaction (e.g., Belsky & Rovine, 1990; Whisman, Beach & Snyder, 2008). Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, and Deiner (2003) followed 24,000 individuals over 15 years and were able to compare satisfaction levels before marriage, the year the couple married, and the years following marriage. Their study found that while some individuals did experience a long-lasting decrease in reported satisfaction over time, many experienced generally stable trajectories, and others experienced a long-lasting increase in satisfaction (and there was a lot of variability in the rates of change). Additionally, they found that one's satisfaction in the years following marriage was strongly predicted by one's initial reaction to marriage (i.e., change in satisfaction from before marriage to the first year of marriage). For example, those who reported little change in happiness from one year pre-marriage to one year post-marriage experienced no long-term changes in happiness (i.e., happiness did not increase or decrease in subsequent measurements). Although the reasons behind these individual differences are not discussed by the authors these findings suggest that one's reaction to the relationship transition plays a key role in one's long-term satisfaction.

To my knowledge, no research has examined factors that predict changes in satisfaction trajectory post-transition. However, research has examined factors that may predict the decline in

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<sup>1</sup> The slope of this decline was marginally significant.

relationship satisfaction generally. A meta-analysis of over 100 longitudinal studies of marriage found that one of the three primary factors that influenced marital outcomes (e.g., divorce) was stress encountered once married, such as the stress of adapting to each other (the other two were personality traits of the spouses and previous experiences e.g., divorce; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). With the role anticipations play in adaptation to stressors, anticipations may also play a role in whether relationship satisfaction declines, remains stable, or increases after moving in with your significant other. As previously discussed those who anticipate both positive and negative outcomes appear to adapt better when experiencing unexpected stressors compared to those who are positively oriented (Churchill & Davis, 2010). Thus, one's orientation to cohabitation may moderate the trajectory of satisfaction over time.

Relatively little research has been conducted to examine whether commitment changes or remains stable during times of transition. One longitudinal study of dating couples transitioning into cohabitation found commitment (measured as dedication to the relationship) increased leading up to the transition but after moving in together, commitment stabilized rather than continuing to increase (Rhoades et al., 2012). Another longitudinal study conducted by Rhoades, Stanley, and Markman (2006) examining interpersonal commitment from pre- to post-marriage found no significant changes in commitment across time. Currently, the limited findings do not paint a clear picture of how (or whether) commitment changes during times of transition. It may be possible however, to estimate the trajectory of commitment by considering its correlation with relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction has been identified as one of the key predictors of commitment (Rusbult 1983; Rusbult, Johnson, Morrow, 1986). It stands to reason that one would be more committed to a relationship that is satisfying. Indeed, research has consistently shown a strong positive correlation between commitment and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Ng,

& Cheng, 2010; Rusbult 1983; Rusbult, Johnson, Morrow, 1986; Webster, Laurenceau, Smith, Mahaffey, Bryan, & Brunell, 2015). This strong link suggests that perhaps commitment and relationship satisfaction may have similar patterns of change during times of transition; however, more research is needed to better understand how transitioning with one's partner may influence commitment.

In the proposed research, I will assess whether anticipating a wide range of positive and negative possibilities (i.e., a realistic orientation to the transition), compared to considering predominantly positive or predominantly negative possibilities (i.e., a positive orientation or a negative orientation to the transition), buffers individuals against disappointments and challenges as they begin cohabitating with their partner. There has been research to suggest this might be the case and that those with a realistic orientation adapt better in the face of unexpected adversity. One of the foundational studies assessing the adaptive nature of a realistic orientation was conducted using a sample of pregnant women expecting their first child (Churchill & Davis, 2010). The women were assessed for orientation prior to delivery and twelve weeks post-partum completed a measure of depression and indicated whether they had encountered any unexpected stressors. Findings showed that not only did a realistic orientation predict better adjustment to parenthood, but realistic individuals also experienced a decrease in depressive symptoms from pre- to post-partum whereas positively and negatively oriented women did not. Furthermore, when the transition was accompanied by unexpected stressors, those who had anticipated both positive and negative outcomes continued to experience this decrease in depressive symptoms whereas those with a positive orientation experienced an increase in depressive symptoms. The results suggest that when one anticipates a novel transition with a realistic orientation, one is buffered against the negative effects of unexpected stressors or challenges.

Based on the Churchill and Davis study, it is proposed that a balance of positively- and negatively-valenced anticipations may help individuals transition to cohabitation with their romantic partner, and buffer individuals from the negative effects associated with unexpected challenges that accompany sharing one's intimate space with another person (e.g., division of household labour). Subsequently, the attenuating the effects of negative experiences may stabilize the trajectory of relationship satisfaction and prevent satisfaction decline following cohabitation.

### *Anticipations, Expectations, and Relationship Outcomes*

Prior to moving in with a romantic partner, individuals are likely going to form many anticipations and expectations regarding a wide variety of relationship- and cohabitation-related issues. They may anticipate feelings of security living with their partner will bring, or the new and fun things they and their partner might do together. They may imagine the feeling of waking up next to their partner each day or the intimacy associated with sharing such a close space with another person. They may also imagine the possibility of arguments over finances, one person having higher standards for cleanliness than the other, or other difficulties associated with navigating a shared space. Although the decision to cohabit does not necessarily indicate change within the nature of a relationship, cohabitation does indicate a change or shift in the stage of the relationship and as such anticipations about cohabitation may not necessarily focus on what the relationship has been (i.e., basing anticipations on past experiences), but on what the relationship could become as a couple who live together. They may develop new anticipations and expectations regarding commitment and intimacy levels. They may form new anticipations and expectations regarding fun and novel activities they will enjoy with their increased shared time together. There are also some novel aspects of living together that will produce

anticipations and expectations. For example, individuals may anticipate what sharing household tasks might be like (e.g., who will do the cooking and who will do the dishes) and then set an expectation for how they expect the division of labour to go.

Given that there is no research examining the link between anticipations and relationships, this research is somewhat exploratory. However, given the established relation between anticipations and expectations as well as the foundational research regarding the function of anticipations (Churchill & Davis, 2010), hypotheses can be advanced regarding the role played by anticipations. As in previous research (conducted in the domain of academic achievement) I expect that those with a greater proportion of positive anticipations will have higher expectations in relationship domains and those with higher proportions of negative anticipations will have lower expectations. As seen in past research (Frank, 2012) those who consider a relative balance of positive and negative possibilities should set expectations similar to those who anticipate mostly positive outcomes and higher than those who anticipate mostly negative outcomes.

As previously discussed, a discrepancy between one's expectations and one's reality can predict dissatisfaction in one's relationship. Unmet expectations not only predict dissatisfaction but ultimately the possible dissolution of the relationship; however, this may not be the case for all. As previously mentioned, those who are positively oriented and realistically oriented are expected to set high expectations in all domains of their relationship, thus it would appear that they are at risk for having those expectations unmet. However, those who are realistically oriented will have anticipated many negative outcomes (e.g., their expectation not being met) and therefore should be less likely to be upset or 'shaken' by unmet expectations. In essence, because they have considered possible outcomes in which their expectations were not met it will

be easier for them to integrate this negative outcome into their personal constructs. This should lead to less disappointment associated with unmet expectations which in turn should predict more stable levels of relationship satisfaction. In contrast, those who are positively oriented are less likely to have considered possibilities where their expectations were not met and should therefore have a more difficult time working that outcome into their personal construct, which should lead to greater levels of disappointment and dissatisfaction. Although negatively oriented individuals should set lower expectations (which should be easier to meet), they may have difficulty working positive outcomes into their personal construct (having primarily anticipated negative possibilities) which should be related to lower levels of satisfaction in the relationship. Thus, although those with a realistic orientation will set high expectations and it is possible those expectations will not be met, because they anticipated an array of both positive and negative outcomes they should experience less distress or disappointment.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to first assess whether a realistic orientation buffers one against unexpected challenges and unmet expectations, and whether this in turn predicts the trajectory of relationship satisfaction and commitment once cohabitating with one's significant other (twelve weeks after moving in together to twenty-four weeks after moving in together). Before conducting such a study, however, it is necessary to validate the questionnaire used to assess orientation to cohabitation. Study I and II are validation studies whereas Study III is the central study of the thesis.

### Studies I-II

Although some anticipations about the future may be broad and non-specific, most are related to a specific, personally-relevant event or experience indicating that they may be context specific. Given this possibility it is important to develop and validate a new measure of

orientation regarding cohabitation. Study I outlines the item generation procedure for the orientation to cohabitation scale and reports on the initial scale's validity and reliability. Study II is a validation study for the final version of the orientation to cohabitation scale.

## Study I

### Orientation to Cohabitation

To develop items that would reflect the types of anticipations that individuals considered prior to moving in together with their significant other I used informal feedback from peers. Several peers<sup>2</sup> who were either moving in with their partner or had just moved in with their partner reflected on anticipations they had considered prior to moving in with their romantic partner. Common themes among the anticipations were used to generate items. Seven negative items were generated (e.g., "I think how hard it will be to share my space with another person") and five positive items were generated (e.g., "I think about how moving in together will make us closer").<sup>3</sup>

To initially validate the orientation to cohabitation scale (OCS), participants completed the OCS along with a measure of dispositional hope (Snyder et al., 1996) and a measure of defensive pessimism (Norem, 2000). I have made the case previously that people who possess a realistic orientation hope for the best, but plan for the worst. To the extent that this is the case, those who score high on the positive and negative subscales of the OCS (i.e., those who are realistic) should score high on the dispositional measures of hope and defensive pessimism. However, although realistically oriented individuals tend to score high on dispositional hope, in

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<sup>2</sup> Five heterosexual female peers provided informal feedback for the creation of the survey. The mean age of the group was 24.40 years of age.

<sup>3</sup> More negative items were generated than positive items because where negative items were specific (e.g., division of labour being uneven), positive anticipations tended to be more general (e.g., excitement about living together) which is more difficult to translate into a concrete item. All peers were looking forward to or enjoying cohabitation with their significant other.

past research they tend to report lower levels of hope compared to positively oriented individuals (e.g., Frank, 2012). Thus, it is expected that realistically oriented individuals will report high levels of hope, but it is also expected that those levels will be lower than their positively oriented counterparts. In contrast, positively-oriented individuals should score high on hope and low on defensive pessimism, and negatively-oriented people should score low on hope and high on defensive pessimism.

Hope is defined as a motivational state that is based on the interaction between its two elements: agency and pathways (Snyder et al. 1996). Agency refers to the motivation level one has to achieve one's goals. Those who score high on agency believe that they have the ability to achieve the goals they set for themselves. Pathways refers to the belief that there are multiple routes available to achieve a goal and a perceived ability to find those alternative routes. Someone who scores high on pathways prepares by anticipating more than one strategy to achieve their goal. Snyder defines hopeful individuals as those who score high on both agency and pathways. Research in the area has suggested that compared to individuals who score low on hope, those who score high on hope are more resilient when encountering adversity (Snyder, 1994, Snyder et al., 2002). One longitudinal study conducted in a university setting followed students over a six-year span and found that those with higher levels of hope were more likely to have higher grades and more likely to have graduated from their program compared to those with lower levels of hope (Snyder et al., 2002).

Defensive pessimism is a cognitive style whereby one imagines that one will do poorly on an upcoming task despite a history of doing well on similar tasks. In addition to imagining poor performance, the defensive pessimist also gives thought to many potential challenges and issues related to the task. The heightened anxiety and stress that comes from such thoughts is

harnessed by the defensive pessimist to motivate performance (Norem & Cantor, 1986; Spencer & Norem 1996). For example, in one study by Norem and Illingworth (2004), when defensive pessimists were assigned to use an optimistic preparation strategy prior to beginning a task they performed worse than when they were allowed to use their preferred strategy.

A realistic orientation has much in common with defensive pessimism but differs in three key respects. First, unlike defensive pessimists, those with a realistic orientation frequently consider a range of positive thoughts in addition to negative thoughts. Second, realistically oriented individuals are motivated to consider negative thoughts in order to feel prepared, whereas defensive pessimists are motivated by stress and anxiety. Third, although realistically oriented people anticipate negative outcomes, they do not set low expectations like defensive pessimists, rather they set fairly high expectations for themselves. In this way those with a realistic orientation could be considered ‘defensive optimists’.

### **Hypotheses:**

- 1) Those with a realistic orientation will score lower than positively-oriented participants on hope and higher than negatively-oriented participants.
- 2) Those with a realistic orientation will score higher on defensive pessimism than positively oriented participants and similar to negatively oriented participants.

### **Methods**

#### **Participants & Procedure**

Participants were recruited online using Mechanical Turk, an online website that connects researchers with a pool of individuals who are interested in participating in research for small monetary compensation. Participants were only eligible if they were planning on cohabitating with their significant other within the next eight weeks. Participants who signed up for the study

were given a link to Qualtrics to complete the survey online. The survey included an informed consent form, the Orientation to Cohabitation Scale (OCS 1.0), the Defensive Pessimism Questionnaire (DPQ), and the Adult Hope Scale (AHS). After completing the OCS 1.0, participants were asked to add any anticipations they may have had about moving in with their partner that were not listed in the OCS. The questionnaires were presented in a randomized order. Participants received \$1.00US for completing the survey package. The study was conducted in March and early April, 2013.

The original sample included 110 participants. Six participants were removed for completing less than 25% of the survey, one participant was removed because they were not currently in a relationship, three participants were removed because they were not planning on moving in with their partner, and 14 participants were removed because they already lived with their partner. The final sample consists of eighty-six individuals (61 men, 25 women) with a mean age of 28.36 ( $SD = 5.10$ ).

## Measures

**Orientation to Cohabitation Scale (OCS 1.0).** The OCS asked participants to rate how frequently they think about each of 12 different possibilities prior to moving in with their romantic partner. Of the 12 thoughts, seven concerned negative or undesirable possibilities (e.g., “I think about how I will lose control of my space”) and five concerned positive or desired possibilities (e.g., “I think about the quality time we will get to spend together”). Items were generated through an informal discussion with several peers who were planning on moving in with or had recently moved in with their significant others. Each item was rated by participants on a 7-point Likert rating scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very frequently). It was anticipated that the items that made up the orientation to cohabitation scale would factor along two dimensions:

positive anticipations and negative anticipations. Participants were also asked to generate possibilities that they had considered that may not have been included in the scale.

A principal component analysis of the ratings ( $n = 86$ ) was conducted on the 12 items, and the scree plot of the eigenvalues suggested that the data best fit a two-factor model (eigenvalues  $> 2.74$ , representing 61.10% of the common variance). Following Varimax rotation, two factors were identified. The first factor included all seven items reflecting negative/undesired anticipations; the second factor included all five of the items intended to reflect positive/desired anticipations (See Table 1).

In order for an item to be retained it had to meet four criteria: 1) it must load on only one (rotated) component greater than .32 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), 2) it must be related theoretically to the other items in the factor, 3) it must improve the reliability (alpha) of the factor, and 4) it must not load substantially on a secondary (rotated) factor (i.e., loading must be less than .32). All items met these criteria. Based on these analyses, a positive thoughts subscale was computed as an average of the five positive/desired items ( $M = 5.61$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ , alpha = .86), and a negative thoughts subscale was computed as an average of the seven negative/undesired items ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ , alpha = .86). The two dimensions were correlated weakly and negatively ( $r = -.24$ ,  $p < .05$ ).<sup>4</sup>

To gain a general sense of thought patterns within this sample, a scatterplot was generated with the positive anticipations subscale on the x-axis and negative anticipations on the y-axis. What can be seen in Figure 2 is that few of the participants had mean scores lower than four (“sometimes”) on the positive thoughts subscale. What this indicates is that few people had a low frequency of positive thoughts regarding their upcoming cohabitation, meaning few of our participants would be categorized as either negatively oriented or not oriented.

<sup>4</sup> Gender differences were assessed by item and no gender differences were identified.

Three ‘groupings’ were created using positive and negative thought scores to confirm these findings. Negatively-oriented thought patterns were categorized as having a mean greater than four on the negative thoughts subscale (i.e., the midpoint on the Likert scale) and simultaneously a mean lower than four on the positive thoughts subscale. Positively oriented individuals were categorized as having a mean lower than four on the negative thoughts subscale, as well as a mean greater than four on the positive thoughts subscale. Realistically oriented individuals were categorized as having a mean greater than four on the negative thoughts subscale and a mean greater than four on the positive thoughts subscale. Using these guidelines the 86 people in the sample were classified: three individuals were identified as ‘negatively oriented’, 40 individuals were classified as ‘positively oriented’, and 38 individuals were classified as ‘realistically oriented’.<sup>5</sup> This preliminary examination of thought patterns suggests that there may not be a substantial number of individuals who are negatively oriented and that most participants would either be considered positively oriented or realistically oriented in relation to their cohabitation.

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<sup>5</sup> Five individuals were classified as not oriented.

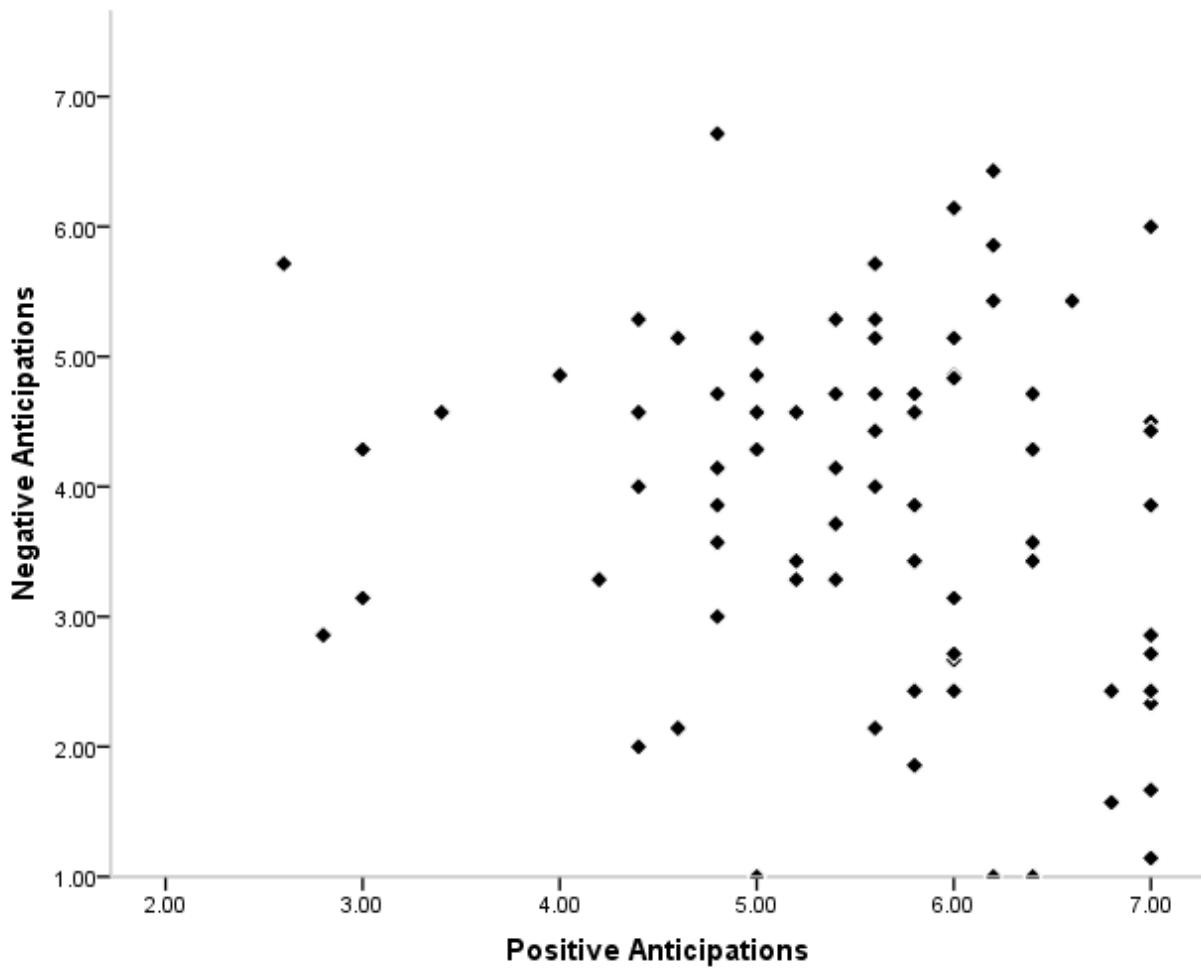


Figure 2. Mean frequency scores for positive and negative thoughts

Table 1

*Factor structure and item loadings of the OCS*

	Component		Descriptives	
	1	2	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
As you think about cohabitating with your partner, how often do you give thought to the following things: Please use the following scale to rate the frequency of the thoughts.				
I think about how difficult it will be to clean a place cohabitated by two people	.828	-.177	3.46	2.00
I think about how hard it will be to share my space with another person	.808	-.107	3.70	1.95
I think about how I will lose control of my space	.791	-.198	3.38	1.95
I think about my partner having different expectations for cleanliness or division of household chores than I do	.791	-.045	4.13	1.75
I think about the possibility we will have financial difficulties or disagreements over finances	.682	-.150	3.96	1.63
I think about the possibility we will disagree on home décor	.660	-.097	3.63	1.82
I think about the extra obligations that come with living together (e.g., family dinners)	.541	.274	4.51	1.75
I think about the quality time we will get to spend together	-.173	.882	5.84	1.20
I think about all the fun activities we will take up together	-.069	.865	5.66	1.32
I think about how moving in together will make us closer	-.197	.848	5.77	1.18
I think about how much fun it will be to decorate our place together	.158	.692	5.00	1.60
I think about how happy I will be to wake up next to him/her every morning	-.245	.692	5.82	1.30

*Note:* Items are listed in order of magnitude of loading. Loading values are based on Varimax

rotation of a two-component principal components analysis. *n* = 86.

Participants had an opportunity to list up to 10 additional anticipations that they may have had. Additional items generated by participants considered the loss of time spent with friends, loss of privacy, and increased pressure on the relationship, saving money on rent, learning more about one's partner, and increased intimacy. The highest frequency items were loss of privacy (I

think about the possibility that I'll miss my privacy/alone time), loss of social time (I think about the possibility I won't get to spend as much time with my friends), and learning more about one's partner (I think about how great it will be to learn more about my partner). Those three items were added to the scale for the next validation study.

**Adult Hope Scale.** The Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1996) contained eight statements, each rated using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (definitely false) to 8 (definitely true). Four items assess Pathways (e.g., "There are lots of ways around any problem") and four items assess Agency (e.g., "I meet the goals I set for myself"). A mean score was calculated for hope ( $M = 4.90$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ ). The Hope Scale is the standard instrument in the field for assessing hope and has demonstrated validity and reliability in prior research (Snyder et al., 1996, Snyder et al., 2002).

**Defensive Pessimism Questionnaire.** Defensive pessimism is defined as "a cognitive strategy in which individuals set low expectations for an upcoming performance, despite having done well in similar situations in the past" (Norem, 2000 p. 77). In addition to this, defensive pessimists spend time anticipating what could go wrong in order to prepare for those possibilities. The DPQ is the leading instrument in the field for measuring defensive pessimism with demonstrated validity and reliability in past research (e.g.,  $\alpha = .84$ , Norem & Illingworth, 1993). A mean defensive pessimist score was calculated ( $M = 4.70$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ ).

## Results

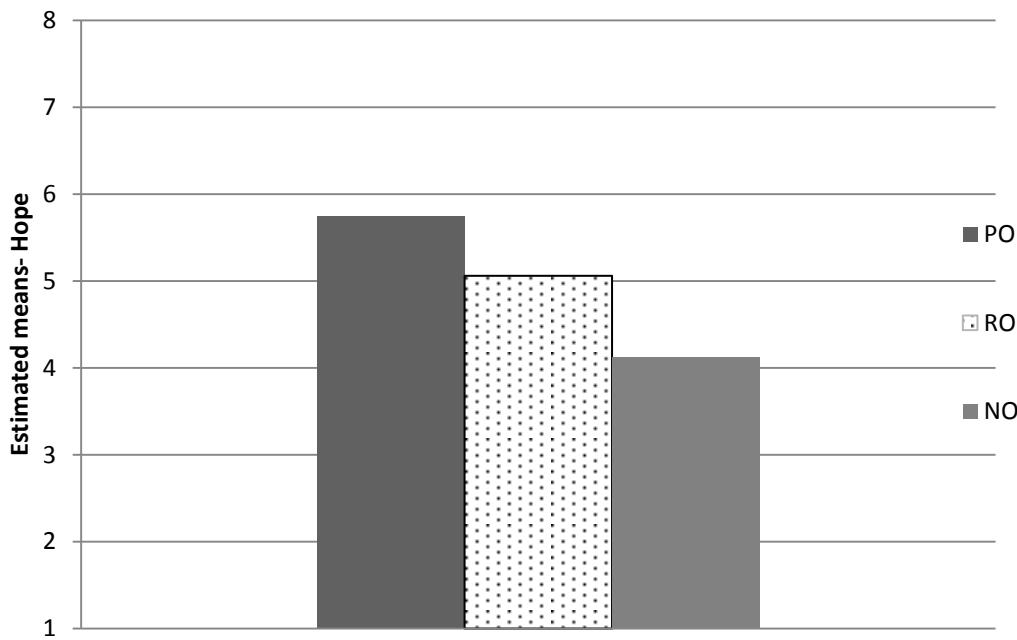
The data were checked for outliers, skewness and kurtosis prior to analysis. No issues with the data were identified during data cleaning. Age, length of relationship, and time left until cohabitation did not correlate significantly with any of the study variables. Gender and defensive pessimism were found to be related such that women ( $M = 5.25$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ) scored higher on

defensive pessimism than men ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ );  $t(83) = -2.73$ ,  $p = .008$ . Thus, gender was controlled for in the defensive pessimism analysis.

To assess whether orientation to cohabitation was associated with the Adult Hope Scale, and the Defensive Pessimism Questionnaire two least squares regressions were conducted. In these regressions, the mean-centered positive thought subscale and mean-centered negative thought subscale were entered on the first step, followed by their multiplicative interaction term on the second step. To test the hypotheses, simple slope analyses were conducted based on the complete regression equation (including the two main effects and the interaction term), even if the interaction term was not significant. The simple slope analyses assess the effect of positive (or negative) thought frequency on the dependent variable (the Adult Hope Scale or the Defensive Pessimism Questionnaire) when negative (or positive) thought frequency is high (+1 SD) and low (-1 SD). This strategy allows one to compare those with a realistic orientation (frequent positive and negative thoughts) with those who are positively oriented (frequent positive thoughts, infrequent negative thoughts) and those who are negatively oriented (infrequent positive thoughts, frequent negative thoughts). In these analyses, I have not plotted the estimated means for those who score low on both positive and negative thoughts (not oriented), as they are not relevant to the hypotheses.

The first regression examined the relation between orientation to cohabitation and hope. Positive anticipations were a significant positive predictor of hope ( $B = .40$ ,  $SE = .12$ , 95% C.I. [.16; .64],  $t = 3.27$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $sr^2 = .10$ ). Negative anticipations were also a significant negative predictor of hope ( $B = -.28$ ,  $SE = .10$ , 95% C.I. [-.47; -.09],  $t = -2.96$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $sr^2 = .08$ ). The interaction term was not significant ( $B = .03$ ,  $SE = .09$ , 95% C.I. [-.16; .21],  $t = 0.29$ ,  $p = .77$ ,  $sr^2 = .0008$ ).

Analysis of simple slopes showed that realistically oriented participants did not differ from positively oriented participants ( $B = -.25$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $t = -1.57$ ,  $p = .12$ ), but scored higher than negatively oriented participants ( $B = .43$ ,  $SE = .18$ ,  $t = 2.43$ ,  $p = .02$ ; see Figure 3) on hope.



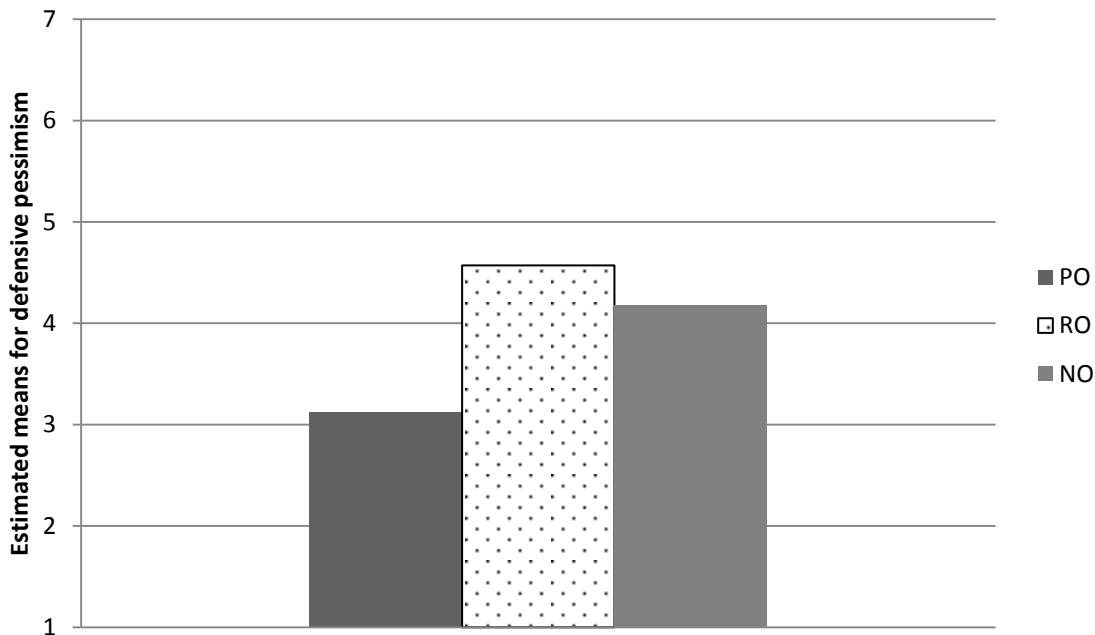
*Figure 3.* Comparing realistic (RO), positive (PO), and negative (NO) orientations on estimated means for hope.<sup>6</sup>

The second regression examined the relation between orientation to cohabitation (positively oriented, negatively oriented, and realistically oriented) and defensive pessimism. First, there was a significant effect of gender such that women scored higher on defensive pessimism than men ( $B = .66$ ,  $SE = .25$ , 95% C.I. [.17; 1.14],  $t = 2.67$ ,  $p = .009$ ,  $sr^2 = .06$ ). Positive anticipations were not a significant predictor of defensive pessimism ( $B = .11$ ,  $SE = .11$ , 95% C.I. [-.11; .32],  $t = 0.98$ ,  $p = .33$ ,  $sr^2 = .008$ ), however, negative anticipations positively and significantly predicted defensive pessimism ( $B = .47$ ,  $SE = .09$ , 95% C.I. [.31; .64],  $t = 5.59$ ,  $p <$

<sup>6</sup> Means are based on regression equation where RO is defined as +1 SD of mean on positive thoughts and +1 SD of mean on negative thoughts. PO is defined as +1 SD of mean on positive thoughts and -1 SD of mean on negative thoughts. NO is defined as -1 SD of mean on positive thoughts and +1 SD of mean on negative thoughts.

.001,  $sr^2 = .26$ ). The interaction term was not significant ( $B = .05$ ,  $SE = .08$ , 95% C.I. [-.11; .22],  $t = 0.66$ ,  $p = .51$ ,  $sr^2 = .004$ ).

Simple slopes analysis revealed that realistically oriented participants scored similarly to negatively oriented participants ( $B = .18$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $t = 1.03$ ,  $p = .31$ ) on defensive pessimism, and higher than positively oriented participants ( $B = .53$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t = 4.05$ ,  $p = .0001$ ; see Figure 4).



*Figure 4.* Comparing realistic (RO), positive (PO), and negative (NO) orientations on estimated means for defensive pessimism.<sup>7</sup>

### Discussion

This study was designed to develop a measure of orientation to cohabitation and to assess that measure's validity. Since the items for the orientation to cohabitation scale were generated with the assistance of a small number of peers who were about to move in with their significant

<sup>7</sup> Means are based on regression equation where RO is defined as +1 SD of mean on positive thoughts and +1 SD of mean on negative thoughts. PO is defined as +1 SD of mean on positive thoughts and -1 SD of mean on negative thoughts. NO is defined as -1 SD of mean on positive thoughts and +1 SD of mean on negative thoughts.

other or had recently done so, it was important to assess the relevance of the items in a larger and more diverse sample, and to identify any gaps or omissions. As shown in Table 1, all of the items generated were endorsed with satisfactory frequency by the MTurk sample, with each positive item receiving a mean frequency rating of at least “Often” (i.e., approximately 5 on the 7-point Likert scale) and each negative item receiving a mean frequency rating of at least “Occasionally” (i.e., 3 on the 7-point scale). The items loaded as expected on either the positive thoughts subscale or the negative thoughts subscale, and the two subscales were shown to be internally consistent and weakly negatively correlated. A preliminary analysis of the thought patterns within the sample suggests that a relatively small number of individuals reported the thought patterns considered to be representative of a negative orientation (i.e. low frequency of positive thoughts, high frequency of negative thoughts). Only three of the 86 (approximately 3%) individuals could be considered to be negatively oriented. These preliminary findings suggest that perhaps there are few, if any, that follow a negative orientation thought pattern when giving thought to their impending cohabitation.

Although rates of endorsement for the items were satisfactory, it is also important to show that the OCS 1.0 does not omit common anticipatory thoughts of individuals on the verge of cohabitation. To determine whether any common anticipatory thoughts were overlooked in the development of the OCS 1.0, participants were asked to identify any additional thoughts that they might have had prior to moving in together. In sum, 11 additional thoughts were suggested by the 86 participants. Of these, three thoughts (2 negative, 1 positive) were suggested by several individuals, and will be added in the next iteration of the OCS (1.1). These items are “I think about the possibility I won’t get to spend as much time with my friends”; “I think about the possibility that I’ll miss my privacy/alone time”; and “I think about how great it will be to learn

more about my partner". All other thoughts suggested were idiosyncratic (e.g., I think about the stress of trying to balance social events at our place).

In order to test the validity of the scale, a series of regressions were run with the two dimensions and an interaction term as predictors and with hope and defensive pessimism as the outcomes. Unexpectedly, those with a realistic orientation scored similarly to those with a positive orientation on hope. Although it was expected that those who were realistically oriented would score lower than those who were positively oriented based on past research (Frank, 2012) it is not unrealistic that realistically oriented participants could be similar to positively oriented participants on hope as both set high expectations and colloquially both 'hope for the best'. As expected both groups scored higher than those who were negatively oriented. These findings support the idea that although realistically oriented participants anticipate negative outcomes they are not negative in their expectations, and are in fact, quite hopeful.

Although the data from Study I suggest that those who are realistically oriented are as hopeful as positively oriented individuals, and more hopeful than negatively oriented individuals, the data also suggest that they score higher on defensive pessimism than positively oriented individuals and as high as negatively oriented individuals. This finding suggests that those who are realistically oriented reflect as often on negative outcomes as someone who is negatively oriented. It is worth noting that although scoring similarly to negatively oriented participants, the estimated means for both realistically oriented participants and negatively oriented participants are only just above the half-way point of the Likert-scale ( $M_{realistic} = 4.5$ ;  $M_{negative} = 4.3$ ) indicating that both groups view negative outcomes as distinct possibilities but are likely not expecting extremely negative outcomes.

The findings of this study suggest that realistically oriented individuals are as hopeful as positively oriented participants, but also consider negative outcomes like negatively oriented participants and regard failure as a possibility. Thus, some validity has been established for this measure of realistic orientation.

## Study II

### Orientation to Cohabitation

A second validation study was conducted for the orientation to cohabitation scale with the three new items (two negative and one positive) that were generated in the first validation study. To validate the revised orientation to cohabitation scale (OCS 1.1), scores on dispositional hope (Snyder et al., 1996) and defensive pessimism (Norem, 2000) were regressed on the revised scale. I also included in this study a measure of dispositional optimism (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994).

Optimism, as measured by the LOT-R (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994), is a dispositional quality defined by a generalized expectancy that the future will go well. Those who are optimistic generate and hold positive expectations for their future. Given this, logically individuals who predominately focus on positive thoughts will also generally expect that things will go well. Realistically oriented individuals while anticipating the worst still generally expect good things and past research has shown that their expectations are high but lower than those set by positively oriented participants (Frank, 2012). Negatively oriented participants tend to set lower expectation for their futures. Therefore, I would hypothesize that realistically oriented participants will score higher on optimism compared to negatively oriented participants, but lower on optimism than positively oriented participants.

### Hypotheses:

- 1) Those with a realistic orientation will score lower than positively oriented participants on hope and higher on hope than negatively oriented participants.
- 2) Replicating the findings of Study I those with a realistic orientation will score similarly to negatively oriented participants on defensive pessimism and higher on defensive pessimism than positively oriented participants.

- 3) Those who are realistically oriented will score lower on optimism compared to positively oriented participants, and higher on optimism than negative oriented participants.

## Methods

### Participants & Procedures

Participants were recruited online using Mechanical Turk, an online website that connects researchers with a pool of individuals who are interested in participating in research for small monetary compensation. Participants were only eligible if they were planning on cohabitating with their significant other within the next eight weeks. Participants who signed up for the study were given a link to Qualtrics to complete the package of surveys online. Participants completed the Orientation to Cohabitation Scale (OCS 1.1), the Defensive Pessimism Questionnaire (DPQ), the Adult Hope Scale (AHS), and Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R). The questionnaires were presented in a randomized order. Participants received \$1.00US for completing the survey package. The study was conducted in April and early May, 2013.

The original sample was 98 participants. Eighteen participants were removed because they already lived with their partner and one person was removed because he was not moving in with his partner. Seventy-nine people remained after exclusions (44 men, 35 women) with a mean age of 31.70 ( $SD = 9.30$ ).

### Measures

**Adult Hope Scale.** As noted earlier, the hope scale assesses two distinct aspects of hope: agency (the belief one can achieve goals) and pathways (the belief one can find alternative routes to one's goal). A mean score was calculated for hope ( $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ,  $\alpha = .94$ ), which was comparable to the mean and standard deviation found in Study I.

**Defensive Pessimism.** As previously noted, defensive pessimism is defined as “a cognitive strategy in which individuals set low expectations for an upcoming performance, despite having done well in similar situations in the past” (Norem, 2000 p. 77). A mean defensive pessimism score ( $M = 4.52$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ ) was calculated and found to be similar to the mean and standard deviation found in Study I.

**The revised Life Orientation Test.** The LOT-R (Scheier et al., 1994) is a six item questionnaire that measures generalized optimism (e.g. “in uncertain times, I usually expect the best,” or “I’m always optimistic about my future”). The items ask respondents to rate on a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) the extent to which they agree with the items. In the present study the mean optimism score was  $M = 3.52$  ( $SD = 0.91$ ). The scale had good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

**Orientation to Cohabitation Scale (1.1).** A principal component analysis of the ratings ( $n = 79$ ) was conducted on the 15 items, and the scree plot of the eigenvalues again suggested that the data best fit a two-factor model (eigenvalues  $> 2.76$ , representing 52.67% of the common variance). Following Varimax rotation, the two factors were identified. The first factor included all nine items reflecting negative/undesired anticipations; the second factor included all six of the items intended to reflect positive/desired anticipations (See Table 2). I followed the same criteria as Study I for item retention. The item “I think about how I will lose control of my space” loaded significantly on both factors ( $> .32$ ), thus the item was excluded from the negative subscale.

Based on these analyses, a positive thoughts subscale was computed as an average of the six positive/desired items ( $M = 5.39$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ,  $\alpha = .81$ ), and a negative thoughts subscale was

computed as an average of the eight negative/undesired items ( $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ,  $\alpha = .84$ ).

The two dimensions were correlated weakly and negatively ( $r = -.27$ ,  $p < .05$ ).<sup>8</sup>

As in Study I, to gain a better understanding of the thought patterns of those about to move in with their partner a scatterplot was generated with the positive anticipations subscale on the x-axis and negative anticipations subscale on the y-axis. What can be seen in Figure 5 is a replication of the findings from Study I where few of the participants have mean scores lower than four (“sometimes”) on the positive thoughts subscale. This provides additional support for our supposition that few people have a low frequency of positive thoughts regarding their upcoming cohabitation.

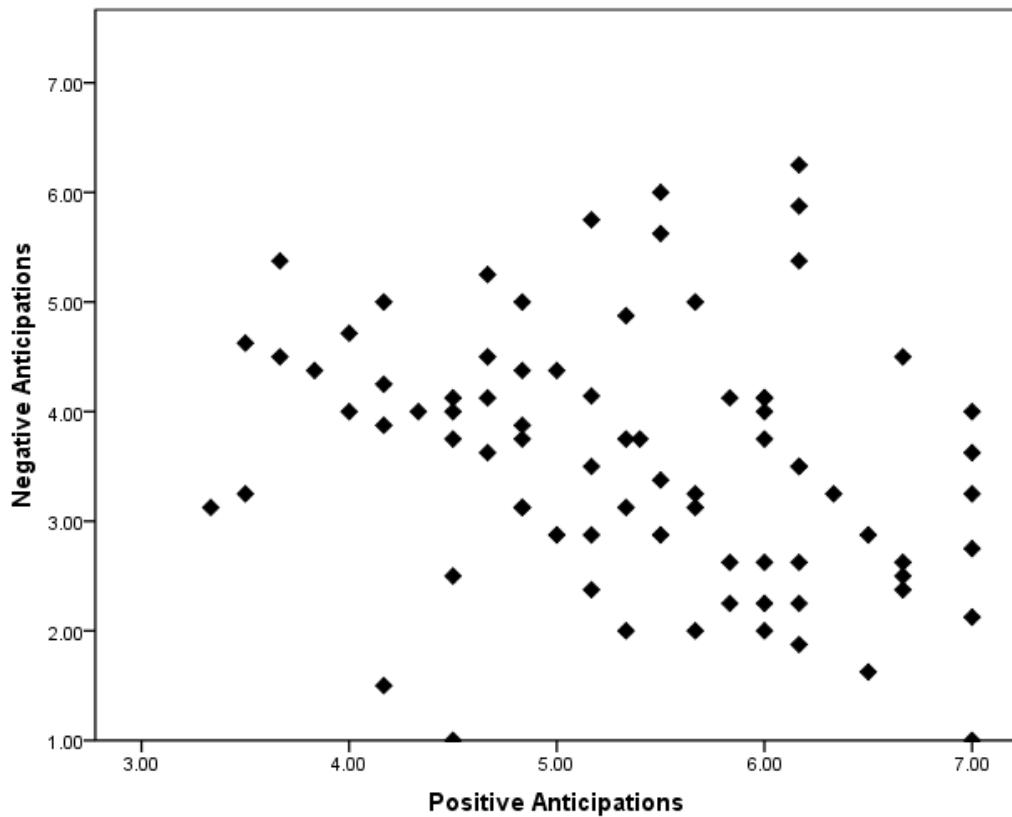
Three ‘groupings’ were again created using positive and negative thought scores. Negatively-oriented thought patterns were categorized as having a mean greater than four (i.e., the midpoint on the Likert scale) on the negative thoughts subscale and simultaneously a mean lower than four on the positive thoughts subscale. Positively oriented individuals were categorized as having a mean lower than four on the negative thoughts subscale, as well as a mean greater than four on the positive thoughts subscale. Realistically oriented individuals were categorized as having a mean greater than four on the negative thoughts subscale and a mean greater than four on the positive thoughts subscale. Using these guidelines all 79 participants in the sample were classified: four individuals were identified as ‘negatively oriented’, 47 individuals were classified as ‘positively oriented’, and 23 individuals were classified as ‘realistically oriented’.<sup>9</sup> This examination of thought patterns continues to suggest that there may not be a substantial number of individuals who are negatively oriented. It is perhaps not

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<sup>8</sup> Items were assessed individually for gender differences. Women were found to score higher than men on two items: “I think about my partner having different expectations for cleanliness or division of household chores than I do” and “I think about the possibility we will have financial difficulties or disagreements over finances”.

<sup>9</sup> Five individuals were classified as not oriented.

surprising that there are so few negatively oriented individuals; it is not clear why someone would choose to move in with their partner if their anticipations were disproportionately negative. Given the findings from Study I and II, for both Study II and Study III the hypotheses will focus only on positively and realistically oriented individuals.



*Figure 5.* Mean frequency scores for positive and negative thoughts

Table 2

*Factor structure and item loadings of the OCS*

	Components		Descriptives	
	1	2	M	SD
As you think about cohabitating with your partner, how often do you give thought to the following things: Please use the following scale to rate the frequency of the thoughts.				
I think about how I will lose control of my space	.773	-.383	3.39	1.70
I think about how difficult it will be to clean a place cohabitated by two people	.771	-.048	3.29	1.76
I think about the possibility I won't get to spend as much time with my friends	.710	-.172	3.23	1.68
I think about how hard it will be to share my space with another person	.692	-.150	3.54	1.74
I think about the possibility we will have financial difficulties or disagreements over finances	.666	.034	3.59	1.68
I think about my partner having different expectations for cleanliness or division of household chores than I do	.664	.198	4.07	1.72
I think about the possibility that I will miss my privacy/alone time	.661	-.308	3.94	1.81
I think about the extra obligations that come with living together (e.g., family dinners)	.645	.042	4.08	1.78
I think about the possibility we will disagree on home décor	.586	-.045	2.99	1.69
I think about all the fun activities we will take up together	-.129	.844	5.28	1.39
I think about the quality time we will get to spend together	-.293	.793	5.69	1.19
I think about how great it will be to learn more about my partner	.074	.717	5.35	1.31
I think about how much fun it will be to decorate our place together	.140	.715	4.71	1.76
I think about how happy I will be to wake up next to him/her every morning	-.262	.670	5.84	1.21
I think about how moving in together will make us closer	-.076	.524	5.44	1.41

*Note:* Items are listed in order of magnitude of loading. Loading values are based on Varimax

rotation of a two-component principal components analysis.  $n = 79$ .

## Results

Prior to any analyses the data were checked for outliers, skewness, and kurtosis. There were no outliers identified in the data ( $\pm 3.29SD$ ). Preliminary analyses revealed that age was significantly correlated with defensive pessimism such that higher reported ages were related to lower defensive pessimism scores  $r(79) = -.23, p = .04$ . Gender was also related to defensive pessimism such that women had higher scores ( $M = 4.85, SD = 1.09$ ) than men ( $M = 4.27, SD = 0.97; t(77) = -2.51, p = .01$ ). Thus, gender and age were controlled for in the defensive pessimism analysis.

Due to the exclusion of the relatively small number of individuals who may be considered negatively oriented ( $n = 4$ ) we can go beyond simply controlling for positive anticipations and using negative anticipations to differentiate between those who are realistically oriented and those who are positively oriented. Given the absence of negatively and not oriented individuals, it is possible to represent the extent to which an individual is positively or realistically oriented with a single variable. This approach has been used to assess contrasting attitudes (Thompson & Zanna, 1995), emotion regulation behaviours (Bonanno, Papa, Lalande, Westphal, & Coifman, 2004), and flexibility in coping (Bonanno, Pat-Horenczyk, & Noll, 2011). The calculation involves three steps: first, a ‘sum of thoughts’ score is created by summing the frequency of positive and negative thoughts subscale scores. Next, a polarity score is created by calculating the absolute value of the discrepancy between positive thoughts and negative thoughts. Finally, the extent to which an individual is realistically oriented (relative to positively oriented) is determined by subtracting the polarity score from the sum of thoughts score. To demonstrate, if a positively oriented individual scored high on the positive thoughts subscale (six on a seven-point scale ranging from one to seven) and low on the negative thoughts subscale (two), then this person would obtain a net score of four (i.e.,  $(6 + 2) - |(6 - 2)|$ ). In contrast, a

realistically oriented person who scored high on both the positive thoughts and negative thoughts scale (e.g., a score of six on both scales) would obtain a net score of 12 (i.e.,  $(6 + 6) - |(6 - 6)|$ ).

Higher scores on the net score indicate a more realistic orientation; lower scores indicate a more positive orientation.

To assess the validity of the revised realistic orientation scale, I correlated the single orientation variable with hope, defensive pessimism, and optimism. Higher values on the orientation item (i.e., a realistic orientation) were associated with lower hope scores ( $r (69) = -.36, p = .002$ ), lower optimism ( $r (69) = -.42, p < .001$ ), and higher defensive pessimism ( $r (69) = .53, p < .001$ ). The association of realistic orientation with defensive pessimism remained after controlling for gender and age ( $pr (67) = .47, p < .001$ ).

### **Discussion**

This study was designed to replicate the findings of Study I with the addition of three new items in developing and validating a measure of orientation to cohabitation. Based on the findings of Study I and the development of the items it was expected that the 15 items would again load on two dimensions (i.e., positive and negative) which was supported by the principle component analysis. The two factors were shown to be internally consistent and were weakly and negatively correlated. As shown in Table 2, all of the items generated were endorsed with reasonably satisfactory frequency by the MTurk sample, with each positive item receiving a mean frequency rating of at least “Often” (i.e., approximately 5 on 7-point Likert scale) and each negative item receiving a mean frequency rating of at least “Occasionally” (i.e., approximately 3 on the 7-point scale). Additional analysis of the thought patterns within the sample supports the findings of Study I that a relatively small number of individuals appear to report the thought pattern considered to be representative of a negative orientation (i.e. low frequency of positive

thoughts, high frequency of negative thoughts). Only four of the 79 (approximately 5%) individuals could be considered negatively oriented. The replication of the findings from Study I indicate that a small proportion of individuals may be considered negatively oriented in relation to cohabitation with their significant other. Given this, future analyses will focus solely on comparing realistically and positively oriented individuals.

In order to test the validity of the scale, a series of correlations were conducted between the single index orientation term with hope, optimism, and defensive pessimism. As expected, the correlation between orientation and hope was significant and negative suggesting those with a realistic orientation report lower levels of hope than those with a positive orientation. The findings support the first hypothesis as those with realistically orientation were not as hopeful as those who were positively oriented.

The correlation between defensive pessimism and orientation was significant and positive indicating that those who are realistically oriented scored higher than positively oriented participants on defensive pessimism. This finding supports the findings from Study I that although generally hopeful, those who are realistically oriented reflect more often on negative outcomes than positively oriented individuals.

I had also hypothesized that those with a realistic orientation would score lower on optimism than those who were positively oriented. This hypothesis was also supported; the correlation between orientation and optimism was significant and negative meaning those who were realistically oriented were significantly lower on optimism from those who were positively oriented.

The findings of this study suggest that realistically oriented individuals are less hopeful and optimistic than positively oriented participants, and consider more negative outcomes.

### Study III

It seems reasonable to assume that the decision to move in with one's romantic partner marks a shift in the commitment each is making to the relationship. Presumably, the decision is influenced by the perception that each is reasonably confident that the relationship is good, and will continue to be satisfying, if not become more satisfying. Unfortunately, research suggests this is not the case for some. Rhoades and colleagues (2012) examined the trajectory of relationship satisfaction over 20 months, including pre-cohabitation and during cohabitation (i.e., after moving in together). They showed that whereas individuals reported an increase in relationship satisfaction leading up to cohabitation, relationship satisfaction tended to decline following cohabitation. They also found that negative communication between partners increased following cohabitation. Similarly, commitment to one's relationship increased leading up to the move and then stabilized once the couple lived together. These findings suggest that there are difficulties associated with cohabitating with one's partner. One factor that may account for the change in trajectory of both satisfaction and commitment is unmet expectations. Much research in the relationship literature has shown that relationship dissatisfaction is correlated with disconfirmation of one's expectations (e.g., Dainton, 2000). Relationship dissatisfaction in turn may lead to decreased commitment (e.g. Rusbult 1983; Rusbult et al., 1986). To the extent that the decision to cohabit represents a significant change in the relationship (colloquially, "moving forward"), individuals may base their expectations on what could be instead of what has been. For example, a qualitative review by Hall and Adams (2011) of individuals who were recently married found that couples who had not cohabitated before marriage expected to feel a lot closer to one another emotionally and expected that their lives to feel more unified after marriage (compared to before they were married). These expectations may be founded on what the relationship could be instead of what the relationship has been. If expectations are

unrealistically high, the subsequent unmet expectations may lead to a decline in satisfaction once the couple is cohabitating.

Another factor that may play a role is unexpected difficulties or challenges. Experiencing unexpected difficulties and challenges can lead to stress within the relationship, which is a predictor of relationship dissatisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Challenges or unexpected difficulties that prevent people from achieving their goals or meeting their expectations can be a significant source of stress (Churchill & Davis, 2010). As previously discussed, a meta-analysis of over 100 longitudinal studies on marriage found stress encountered after marriage (a period of transition) significantly predicted relationship outcomes (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). For example, higher levels of stress were associated with an increased risk of subsequent divorce.

The decline in relationship satisfaction during times of transition (e.g., after moving in together), however, may not occur for all. In a study conducted by Belsky and Rovine (1990), married couples (married for an average of 4 years) expecting their first child were sampled during pregnancy, 3 months, 9 months, and 36 months postpartum. The study found that whereas approximately 44% of the sample experienced a decline in satisfaction over time, 45% experienced no change, and 11% experienced a modest increase. Other research also indicates that although satisfaction tends to decline from pre- to post-marriage (i.e., the couple is now married), not all couples experience this downward trend (Lucas et al., 2003; Whisman et al., 2008), indicating that there are unidentified factors that influence the trajectory of satisfaction across significant transitions.

Less research has been done examining how commitment changes during times of transition, but past research has shown a strong link between relationship satisfaction and commitment suggesting they may have similar trajectories (e.g., Ng, & Cheng, 2010; Rusult

1983; Rusbult et al., 1986; Webster et al., 2015). Research has yet to explore what individual factors may influence this trajectory.

In relation to unmet expectations, past research has found that when one does not consider possible negative outcomes or setbacks, it can be more difficult to adjust or adapt if and when those difficulties occur (Churchill & Davis, 2010). To the extent that positively oriented individuals do not adequately consider the possibility of anything but positive outcomes, they may have a difficult time working negative outcomes into their personal constructs. In the context of a relationship, failure to adequately consider the challenges and compromises that might arise when one moves in with one's partner could conceivably lead to some disappointment with one's partner and dissatisfaction with the relationship. Those who are realistically oriented, on the other hand, should be better able to incorporate such challenges and compromises into their personal constructs because they have anticipated that cohabitation may be a mix of positives and negatives. This should hedge against feelings of disappointment and dissatisfaction (and subsequent disengagement from the relationship). Indeed, preliminary evidence from two studies suggests that those with a realistic orientation are better able to adapt to unexpected challenges than those with a positive orientation. In their study of first-time expectant mothers, Churchill and Davis (2010) found that expectant mothers with a realistic orientation prepartum were less distressed when challenges emerged in the first few weeks after their baby's birth than positively oriented women. This leads me to anticipate that compared to positively oriented individuals, those with a realistic orientation towards cohabitation will be less likely to report a decline in relationship satisfaction after moving in with their partner should unexpected challenges arise or if their expectations are not met.

The purpose of this study is to assess the extent to which a realistic orientation moderates the relationship between both unmet expectations and unexpected challenges on relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment. The findings of Study I and II suggest that few people adopt a negative orientation when anticipating their upcoming cohabitation with their partner. Given this, hypotheses will only be made comparing those who are realistically oriented and those who are positively oriented. There are several hypotheses associated with this study.<sup>10</sup>

### Hypotheses:

- 1) Those with a realistic orientation and those with a positive orientation will have similar expectations regarding cohabitation with their significant other.
- 2) When there are no reported unexpected challenges I hypothesize that positively and realistically oriented participants will have stable trajectories of relationship satisfaction and commitment. However, I hypothesize that when there are reported unexpected challenges, those with a realistic orientation will have a stable trajectory of relationship satisfaction and commitment whereas positively oriented participants will experience a decrease in relationship satisfaction and commitment.
- 3) When expectations are met (or exceeded) I hypothesize that positively and realistically oriented participants will have stable trajectories of relationship satisfaction and commitment. However, when expectations are not met, I hypothesize that those with a realistic orientation will have a stable trajectory of relationship satisfaction and commitment whereas positively oriented participants will experience a decrease in relationship satisfaction and commitment.

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<sup>10</sup> The second and third hypotheses are the same for both outcomes (i.e., commitment and relationship satisfaction) so for simplicity's sake the hypotheses are only written once

- 4) Orientation, unmet expectations, satisfaction at Time 1, and commitment at Time 1 will predict whether a couple continues to cohabit with one another at Time 2 and Time 3.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were recruited online using Amazon's MTURK, an online survey tool where community members receive monetary compensation for completing surveys. In order to be eligible for the study participants had to be currently in a romantic relationship, planning on moving in with their partner in the next four to eight weeks, and it had to be their first time cohabitating with a significant other.

Two hundred and ninety one participants were recruited at Time 1. The sample had a mean age of 28.21 ( $SD = 7.05$ ) and was 52.4% female. Eight Time 1 participants indicated that they did not wish to be contacted further (by failing to provide their email address) and consequently were not contacted for Time 2 or Time 3. One hundred and eighty six participants participated in Time 2 data collection (63.9% of Time 1 participants;  $M_{age} = 28.82$   $SD = 7.32$ ; 55.1% were female). Twenty-one of the Time 2 participants reported that their relationship had ended or that they were no longer living with their partner, and so were no longer eligible for Time 3. One hundred and seventy seven individuals participated in Time 3 of data collection ( $M_{age} = 28.23$   $SD = 6.39$ ; 55.6% were female). Fourteen of these individuals reported that their relationship had ended or that they were no longer living with their partner. Approximately sixty-five percent ( $n = 177$ ; 64.6%) of the eligible participants who participated in Time 1 also participated in Time 3. To assess attrition effects a series of t-tests were run to assess whether the sample of participants who did not complete Time 2 of the study differed significantly from those who remained in the study on the variables of interest (i.e., orientation, relationship

satisfaction, commitment, and expectations). The same set of t-tests were conducted to assess whether the sample of participants who did not complete Time 3 of study differed significantly from those who remained in the study. Results showed no significant differences between the two groups on the outcomes at either time.

### **Procedure**

This study had three waves of data collection. First, participants completed Time 1 of the study four to eight weeks prior to their expected move in date with their partner. Time 2 was completed approximately 12 weeks after moving in together and Time 3 was completed 24 weeks after moving in together. These time frames were selected because they have been used in past longitudinal research examining relationships and orientation (e.g., Churchill & Davis, 2010; Johnson & Bradbury, 1999, Lavner & Bradbury, 2010, Rhoades et al., 2012). Participants received \$1.00US for participating in Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3. Participants also received a bonus \$1.00US for completing all three waves of data collection.

**Time 1.** Participants who were eligible for the study were recruited through MTURK (four to eight weeks prior to their date of cohabitation) to complete the orientation to cohabitation scale, a measure of relationship satisfaction, a measure of commitment, and a measure looking at expectations for cohabitation. Participants were also asked to indicate their move in date with their partner and to provide an email address for the purpose of recruitment for Time 2 and Time 3 of the study.

**Time 2.** Participants who consented to be contacted for Time 2 were invited by email to complete the second survey 12 weeks after their indicated move in date. They were given one week to complete the second survey. Participants received a reminder email halfway through the week and then a final reminder email at the end of the week. The Time 2 survey included a

measure of relationship satisfaction, a measure of commitment, a measure that assessed their actual experience in the same domains as the expectations indicated in Time 1, and a question assessing unexpected challenges experienced while cohabitating.

**Time 3.** Participants who consented to be contacted for Time 3 were emailed a link 24 weeks after their indicated move in date. Like at Time 2, participants received an initial email inviting them to participate in Time 3 of our study, and were asked to complete the survey package within the next seven days. Participants received a reminder email halfway through the week and then a final reminder email at the end of the week. This survey package included measures of relationship satisfaction and commitment.

## Measures

**Orientation to Cohabitation Scale (OCS 1.2).** Due to concern over gender bias (only women were sampled during the item generation phase) four men who were moving in with their significant others were also sampled for item generation. Three additional items were added to the scale prior to the data collection for Study III<sup>11</sup>. The OCS 1.2 was administered at Time 1, before participants moved in with their partner. As described in Studies I and II, this questionnaire asks participants to indicate the frequency with which they have thought about various positive (desired) and negative (undesired) possible scenarios or situations associated with living with their partner as they think about moving in together with their partner. Each item was rated by participants on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very frequently). The current scale is composed of 18 items of which eleven reflect negative thoughts and seven reflect positive thoughts.

A principal component analysis of the ratings ( $n = 291$ ) was conducted on the 18 items, and the scree plot of the eigenvalues again suggested that the data best fit a two-factor solution

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<sup>11</sup> New items are bolded in Table 3

(eigenvalues  $> 3.24$ , representing 47.35% of the common variance). Following Varimax rotation, the two factors were identified. The first factor included all eleven items reflecting negative/undesired anticipations; the second factor included all seven of the items intended to reflect positive/desired anticipations (See Table 3). I followed the same criteria as in Study I and Study II for item retention.

Based on these analyses, a positive thoughts subscale was computed as an average of the seven positive/desired items ( $M = 5.68$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ,  $\alpha = .86$ ), and a negative thoughts subscale was computed as an average of the eleven negative/undesired items ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ,  $\alpha = .84$ ). The two dimensions were correlated weakly and negatively ( $r = -.20$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Table 3

*Factor structure and item loadings of the OCS*

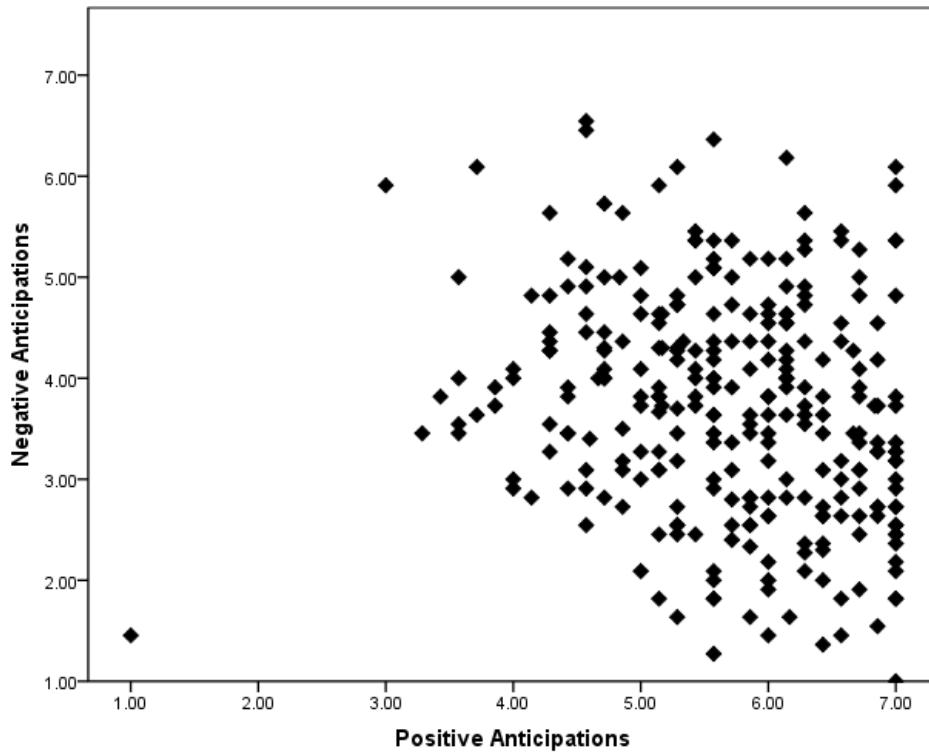
	Components		Descriptives	
	1	2	M	SD
As you think about cohabitating with your partner, how often do you give thought to the following things: Please use the following scale to rate the frequency of the thoughts.				
I think about how difficult it will be to clean a place cohabitated by two people	.720	-.049	3.38	1.80
I think about my partner having different expectations for cleanliness or division of household chores than I do	.709	-.039	4.11	1.80
I think about how I will lose control of my space	.697	-.124	3.47	1.67
<b>I think about the possibility we will annoy one another by spending so much time together</b>	.690	-.129	3.95	1.67
I think about the possibility that I will miss my privacy/alone time	.686	-.118	4.02	1.73
<b>I think about the stress of having to determine how to split the costs of living together</b>	.674	-.064	3.59	1.73
I think about the extra obligations that come with living together (e.g., family dinners)	.627	.095	4.13	1.72
I think about the possibility we will have financial difficulties or disagreements over finances	.615	-.078	3.82	1.61
I think about how hard it will be to share my space with another person	.593	-.052	3.98	1.77
I think about the possibility I won't get to spend as much time with my friends	.558	-.205	3.16	1.70
I think about the possibility we will disagree on home décor	.479	-.057	3.28	1.60
I think about the quality time we will get to spend together	-.084	.802	5.95	1.13
I think about all the fun activities we will take up together	-.061	.772	5.63	1.28
I think about how moving in together will make us closer	.072	.769	5.85	1.12
I think about how happy I will be to wake up next to him/her every morning	-.167	.742	6.02	1.26
I think about how great it will be to learn more about my partner	-.167	.715	5.43	1.30
I think about how much fun it will be to decorate our place together	-.007	.667	5.05	1.64
<b>I think about the increased opportunities for physical intimacy</b>	-.164	.630	5.86	1.27

*Note:* Items are listed in order of magnitude of loading. Loading values are based on Varimax

rotation of a two-component principal components analysis.  $n = 291$ .

To confirm the findings of Study I and Study II that there appear to be few individuals who would be considered negatively oriented, a scatterplot was generated with the positive anticipations subscale on the x-axis and negative anticipations subscale on the y-axis. What can be seen in Figure 6 is a replication of the findings from Study I and Study II where only 12 of the 291 participants (approximately 4%) have mean scores lower than four (“sometimes”) on the positive thoughts subscale. This provides additional support for the supposition that few people have a low frequency of positive thoughts regarding their upcoming cohabitation. Because there were so few negatively oriented or ‘not oriented’ individuals (i.e., those scoring low on positive thoughts), my analyses focus on differences between those who are positively oriented (frequent positive thoughts, infrequent negative thoughts) and those who are realistically oriented (frequent positive thoughts, frequent negative thoughts).

As in Study II given the absence of negatively and not oriented individuals, it is possible to represent the extent to which an individual is positively or realistically oriented with a single variable (similar computation seen in Bonanno et al., 2004; Bonanno et al., 2011; Thompson & Zanna, 1995). As mentioned in Study II the calculation involves three steps: first, a ‘sum of thoughts’ score is created by summing the frequency of positive and negative thoughts subscale scores. Next, a polarity score is created by calculating the absolute value of the discrepancy between positive thoughts and negative thoughts. Finally, the extent to which an individual is realistically oriented (relative to positively oriented) is determined by subtracting the polarity score from the sum of thoughts score. Higher scores on the net score indicate a more realistic orientation; lower scores indicate a more positive orientation.



*Figure 6.* Mean frequency scores for positive and negative thoughts

To ensure the current scale is capable of differentiating between positively oriented and realistically oriented participants, defensive pessimism was correlated with the orientation index while controlling for gender. As expected, the association of realistic orientation with defensive pessimism remained after controlling for gender such that those who are realistically orientated have higher scores on defensive pessimism than those who are positively oriented ( $pr(283) = .30, p < .001$ ).

**Relationship Satisfaction.** Relationship satisfaction was assessed at each time point using the satisfaction subscale of the investment model scale (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). The first five items ask participants to rate the degree of agreement on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (don't agree at all) to 4 (agree completely). The items assess whether the participant feels the partner is fulfilling his or her needs within different areas of the relationship

(e.g., “my partner fulfils my needs for intimacy”) and are meant to provide respondents with concrete examples of relationship satisfaction. These items have participants think concretely about relationship satisfaction to allow them to better conceptualize and answer the subsequent global satisfaction questions. Thus, these five items are included only to increase the reliability and validity of the global satisfaction items.

The last five items assess a global construct of satisfaction and ask participants to rate agreement on a 9-point Likert scale from 1 (do not agree at all) to 9 (agree completely). Items ask participants to reflect on statements relating to their feelings regarding their relationship (e.g., Our relationship makes me happy; Our relationship is close to ideal). A mean score was created using the average of the five items ( $M_{time1} = 7.69, SD = 1.16$ ;  $M_{time2} = 7.37, SD = 1.59$ ;  $M_{time3} = 7.15, SD = 1.93$ ). The investment model scale is widely used and the satisfaction subscale has demonstrated validity and reliability in past research (e.g., Rusbult et al., 1998). The reliability of the 5-item scale was excellent with alphas ranging between .89-.97.

**Relationship Commitment.** Relationship commitment was measured at each time point using the seven-item commitment subscale of the investment model scale (Rusbult et al., 1998). Each item is rated on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 9 (agree completely). Items ask participants to reflect on statements relating to the maintenance and continuation of their relationship (e.g., I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner). A mean score was created using an average of the seven items ( $M_{time1} = 7.96, SD = 1.24$ ;  $M_{time2} = 7.87, SD = 1.35$ ;  $M_{time3} = 7.93, SD = 1.26$ ). As mentioned above the investment model scale is widely used and the commitment subscale has demonstrated reliability in past research (Rusbult et al., 1998). The reliability of the scale in the current study was acceptable with alphas ranging between .84-.90.

**Expectations for Cohabitation.** One's expectations for cohabitation were measured at Time 1 using a six-item questionnaire developed for this study (See Appendix A for the measure). The questionnaire asks participants to rate their expectations for how life would change from the present in a variety of areas related to cohabitation on a 9-point Likert scale. Each item used anchors related to the concept assessed in the item. For instance, the statement about expectations for how the amount of quality time with their partner would change after moving in together had response options anchored by 1 = significantly less quality time and 9 = significantly more quality time. In each case, the midpoint of the scale (5) indicated 'no change' from present. The items for this scale (as well as the experiences scale described below) were developed through discussions with Dr. Harasymchuk, a relationships researcher. Items were developed to assess participant expectations on a variety of topics that were expected to be influenced by the process of cohabitating with your significant other (e.g., levels of closeness/intimacy, happiness in the relationship, quality time with one's partner). The scale had good reliability ( $\alpha = .87$ ). The mean for this scale was 7.38 ( $SD = 1.11$ ) indicating an optimistic view that participants generally felt like their relationship would improve in each area following cohabitation.<sup>12</sup>

**Challenges in Cohabitation.** Participants were asked at Time 2 to indicate whether they experienced any unexpected challenges while cohabitating with their partner. If they replied affirmatively, they were asked to identify the challenges. Only 12% of participants ( $n = 20$ ) indicated experiencing unexpected challenges associated with living with their partner (separate from any general life events). Most commonly participants reported dividing up household responsibilities and dividing finances to be most stressful (nine participants). Other challenges

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<sup>12</sup> In fact on each item, more than 80% of participants indicated that they expected improvement (e.g., increased quality time) after they cohabitated compared to before cohabitation.

reported were having a lazy or messy partner, a partner that ‘picks fights’, needing more space, and emotional cheating.

**Experiences in Cohabitation.** In order to assess any differences between expectations at Time 1 and experiences at Time 2, the wording of the six questions from the Expectations for Cohabitation questionnaire were altered at Time 2 to prompt participants to compare their current experience with past experience (instead of comparing their current experience and future experience as in the expectations scale). The Experiences questionnaire asks participants to rate how their life has changed from the past (i.e., pre-cohabitation) to the present (currently cohabitating) in a variety of areas related to cohabitation on a 9-point Likert scale. Each item used anchors related to the concept assessed in the item. For instance, the statement about their experience regarding the current amount of quality time spent with their significant other compared to the amount of quality time they spent together prior to cohabitation had response options anchored by 1 = significantly less quality time (compared to before living together) and 9 = significantly more quality time (compared to before living together). In each case, the midpoint of the scale (5) indicated ‘no change’ from the past. The scale had excellent reliability ( $\alpha = .91$ ). The mean for the Experience scale was 6.72 ( $SD = 1.46$ ) indicating that individuals generally did experience increases in the measured constructs (e.g., they feel more close/intimate with their partner now that they live together compared to before they lived together).

The extent to which expectations were unmet was determined by subtracting the participant’s score on the Time 2 Experiences scale from the Time 1 Expectations for Cohabitation scale. Thus, positive scores indicate that one’s expectations were greater than one’s experiences (i.e., that one’s expectations were not met), a score of zero indicates one’s expectations matched one experiences, and negative scores indicate that one’s experiences were

better than expected (i.e., that one's expectations were exceeded). This value was termed 'unmet expectations'.<sup>13</sup>

## Results

### Data Cleaning

First, twelve participants were removed from the analysis for scoring lower than four on the positive anticipations subscale.

Prior to any analyses the data were checked for outliers, skewness, and kurtosis. At Time 1 there were two outliers identified on commitment ( $z$  scores of -4.63 and -3.57). The two participants' scores were adjusted to be within 3.29 standard deviations of the mean (with the outliers excluded). After the scores were adjusted, commitment was rechecked for outliers and no problematic cases were identified. At Time 2 another single outlier was identified on the commitment scale (one of the outliers from Time 1). Again, the participant's score was adjusted to fall within 3.29 standard deviations of the adjusted mean. This adjustment resolved the outlier.

At Time 2 relationship satisfaction had a single univariate outlier. The outlier was adjusted by bringing the score within 3.29 standard deviations of the mean (excluding the outlier). This resolved the issue and no additional outliers were identified. There were no additional outliers identified in the data on any other variable ( $\pm 3.29$  SDs; Cohen, Cohen, West, Aiken, 2003).

Both commitment and relationship satisfaction were found to be significantly and negatively skewed at all three time points. Although a log transformation would improve normality for both variables, there is a case to be made for using the raw data in the analyses. Three of the main reasons for transformation are to: improve normality, simplify the relation between your independent variable and dependent variable, and improve heteroscedasticity

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<sup>13</sup> A participant must have participated in both Time 1 and Time 2 to have an unmet expectations score.

(Cohen et al., 2003). The transformation does improve normality; however, due to the high number of individuals whose scores are the maximum possible, the distribution is still not ideal. Furthermore, upon inspection of plots between orientation and the raw and transformed variables of interest (i.e., relationship satisfaction and commitment), it does not appear that transformation has improved linearity. Additionally, upon plotting the residuals to assess heteroscedasticity, the transformation does not appear to have improved heteroscedasticity for relationship satisfaction and only mildly improved heteroscedasticity for commitment. In addition, in relationship research that also used the investment model scales, similar means and standard deviations to the ones found in our sample have been reported and all the publications reported and used raw data and did not use transformations (e.g., Emery, 2015; Hofmann, Finkel, & Fitzsimons, 2015; Tan & Agnew, 2016; Webster et al., 2015). Last, raw data are easier to interpret than transformed data. Thus, for these reasons, it was determined that the raw data would be used in the main analysis.

### Preliminary Analyses

Prior to all preliminary analyses the effect of age and gender were assessed. Age was not significantly associated with relationship satisfaction, or commitment ( $p > .27$ ). There were significant gender differences in Time 1 commitment ( $M_{women} = 8.20, SD = 1.06; M_{men} = 7.70, SD = 1.37; t = -3.41, p = .001$ ), but not Time 1 relationship satisfaction ( $M_{women} = 7.79, SD = 1.08; M_{men} = 7.73, SD = 1.08; t = -.43, p = .67$ ). Thus gender will be controlled for in analyses where commitment are the outcome variables.

To assess whether a significant difference existed between participants' expectations from cohabitation and their experiences with cohabitation within the sample, first a variable

representing one's unmet expectations was created<sup>14</sup>, then a one-sample t-test was conducted with zero<sup>15</sup> as the test value. Results show that a discrepancy between expectations and experiences existed, where expectations were higher than actual experiences,  $M$  discrepancy = 0.67,  $SD$  = 1.35;  $t(153)$  = 6.36,  $p < .001$ .

Next, I examined whether orientation (index of positive to realistic orientation) was correlated with relationship satisfaction and commitment prior to cohabitation. First, a correlation was conducted between orientation and relationship satisfaction. Results indicated a negative and significant correlation,  $r(274)$  = -.25,  $p < .001$ , such that those who are realistically oriented tend to score lower on initial relationship satisfaction compared to positively oriented individuals. Second, gender and orientation were entered into a regression analysis predicting commitment. Results showed gender as a significant predictor of commitment,  $B$  = .51,  $SE$  = .14,  $\beta$  = .21,  $t$  = 3.70, 95% C.I. [.24; .79],  $p < .001$ ,  $sr^2$  = .04 where women reported higher levels of commitment than men. Orientation also significantly predicted commitment ( $B$  = -.21,  $SE$  = .03,  $\beta$  = -.34,  $t$  = 6.67, 95% C.I. [-.27; -.14],  $p < .001$ ,  $sr^2$  = .11) where those who were realistically oriented reported lower levels of commitment than those who were positively oriented.

### Main Analyses

Prior to all main analyses the effects of age and gender were assessed. There was neither a main effect of age nor an interaction between age and time in predicting relationship satisfaction ( $ps > .28$ ) or commitment ( $ps > .11$ ), nor did age predict expectations. There was a significant relation between age and breakups ( $r(265)$  = .17,  $p = .005$ ). Gender did not significantly predict relationship satisfaction as a main effect, nor did the interaction between

<sup>14</sup> As a reminder, unmet expectations was created by subtracting the participant's score on the Time 2 Experiences scale from the Time 1 Expectations for Cohabitation scale. Thus, positive scores indicate that one's expectations were greater than one's experiences and negative scores indicate that one's experiences exceeded expectations.

<sup>15</sup> A value of zero would indicate that one's expectations and one's experiences for cohabitation were the same.

gender and time significantly predicting relationship satisfaction ( $ps > .15$ ). Gender also did not predict breakups ( $ps > .15$ ). Gender did have a marginally significant main effect on commitment ( $B = .34$ ,  $SE = .19$ ,  $t = 1.78$ ,  $p = .08$ ), but the gender by time interaction was not significant ( $p = .69$ ). There were also significant gender differences in expectations ( $M_{women} = 7.60$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ;  $M_{men} = 7.29$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ;  $t = -2.51$ ,  $p = .013$ ). Gender will therefore be included as a main effect in analyses where commitment is the outcome, in analyses where expectations are the outcome, and age will be controlled for in analyses where breakups is the outcome.

First, to test the hypothesis that those with a realistic orientation and those with a positive orientation would set similar expectations for cohabitation a multiple regression was conducted. Gender and orientation were entered into a regression predicting expectations. Gender was a significant predictor of expectations where women set higher expectations than men ( $B = .34$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $\beta = .16$ ,  $t = 2.72$ , 95% C.I. [.10; .59],  $p = .007$ ,  $sr^2 = .03$ ). Unexpectedly, orientation also significantly predicted expectations for cohabitation ( $B = -.07$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $\beta = -.13$ ,  $t = -2.25$ , 95% C.I. [-.13; -.01],  $p = .02$ ,  $sr^2 = .01$ ) where those who were realistically oriented set lower expectations than those who were positively oriented.

Given this unexpected finding I examined whether orientation would correlate with unmet expectations. If those who were realistically oriented set lower expectations than those who were positively oriented it may be that they would be more likely to have their expectations met (i.e., have a lower score on unmet expectations). There was no significant correlation between orientation and unmet expectations indicating that although those with a realistic orientation set lower expectations than those who are positively oriented there were no differences regarding whether those expectations were met,  $r(152) = .06$ ,  $p = .44$ .

To test the hypothesis that when no unexpected challenges are reported positively and realistically oriented participants have stable trajectories of relationship satisfaction, but when unexpected challenges are reported those with a realistic orientation continue to have a stable trajectory of relationship satisfaction where positively oriented participants experience a decrease in relationship satisfaction, a hierarchical linear model (HLM) was conducted. HLM allows us to assess change in our outcome variables over time (i.e., do relationship satisfaction and commitment change over time; level 1), but also allows us to predict these changes with specific predictors (i.e., orientation, unmet expectations; level 2). Twenty-seven participants were not included in the analysis as they did not participate in Time 2 data collection.<sup>16</sup> The final sample for the hierarchical linear model consisted of 152 participants.

Before testing the hypotheses regarding changes in satisfaction and commitment over time, it is important to examine the extent to which the variance of dependent variable scores (relationship satisfaction and commitment) is attributable to within person change (i.e., differences in scores over time) relative to between person differences (i.e., differences in mean scores between participants). An intercepts-only multilevel model effectively partitions the variance into between and within person variance. This analysis indicated that for relationship satisfaction, 55.4% of the variance in scores was between person variance (and hence, 44.6% was within person variance). For commitment, an intercepts-only multilevel model indicated that 65.3% of the variance was between person variance (and hence, 34.7% was within person variance). This indicates that for both outcomes, there is sufficient variance to explain at both levels. The data were also checked to assess whether the models met the assumptions for hierarchical linear modeling. First, the four models were tested for heteroscedasticity, which

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<sup>16</sup> Participants who did not participate in Time 2 did not have data for unmet expectations or challenges and could therefore not be a part of the predictive model.

requires that level 1 residual variance be constant. Chi-squares testing the variance of the residuals for the four models were not significant ( $p > .5$ ) indicating that the level 1 residual variance is homogeneous. Next, the four models were assessed for normality by examining whether the level-1 residuals are normally distributed and whether the level two random effect means have a multivariate normal distribution. The normality of the level-1 residuals of the four models was assessed by plotting the residuals in a Q-Q plot. The pattern of the residuals showed slight deviations from the 45 degree line particularly at the ends indicating some non-normality. As the sample size is over 100 I was able to use robust standard errors to correct for this slight non-normality (Maas & Hox, 2004). The level-2 multivariate normality was assessed by using Mahalanobis' distance generated from the level-2 residuals. Q-Q plots showed that the level-2 residuals of the four models were not normally distributed. Research has shown that non-normal residuals at the second level of a model have little to no effect on parameter estimates and therefore no corrective measures were employed (Mass & Hox, 2004). Last, I assessed whether the observations at the highest level (i.e., between individuals) were independent of one another. Theoretically, because the individuals were not from the same couple and for all intents and purposes not connected the assumption of independence of observations is perceived to be met.

To test whether the relation between unexpected challenges and change in satisfaction over time differed depending on one's orientation I used hierarchical linear modelling (HLM). I constructed a multilevel model where relationship satisfaction at time<sub>i</sub> was regressed on time (at level 1; i.e., within person change), orientation, unexpected challenges, and their interaction (at level 2; i.e., between persons). I had hypothesized that when no unexpected challenges were reported, the slope for relationship satisfaction would be negligible (essentially zero) regardless of orientation, but when unexpected challenges were present, those who were positively oriented

would experience a decline in satisfaction whereas those who were realistic would experience no decline in satisfaction. The test of this effect in the multilevel model is encapsulated in the effect of the orientation by challenge on the time slope ( $B_{13}$ ) in the model below. In this model, time, orientation, and challenges are grand mean centered.<sup>17</sup>

*Level 1:*

$$\text{Relationship Satisfaction}_{it} = \pi_{0i} + \pi_{1i}(\text{time}_{it}) + e_{it}$$

*Level 2:*

$$\pi_0 = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01}(\text{orientation}_t) + \beta_{02}(\text{challenges}_t) + \beta_{03}(\text{orientation}_t * \text{challenges}_t) + r_{0t}$$

$$\pi_1 = \beta_{10} + \beta_{11}(\text{orientation}_t) + \beta_{12}(\text{challenges}_t) + \beta_{13}(\text{orientation}_t * \text{challenges}_t) + r_{1t}$$

The analyses indicated a main effect of time ( $B = -.13$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t = -2.50$ ,  $p = .01$ ), indicating that relationship satisfaction declined from pre-cohabitation to 24 months post-move in. There was also a main effect of orientation where those who were realistically oriented had lower relationship satisfaction scores than those who are positively oriented ( $B = -.15$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $t = -3.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ). None of the variables interacted with time (i.e., were significant predictors of the slope). Table 4 provides details of the analyses.

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<sup>17</sup> By grand-mean centering the variables estimates of the intercept are easier to interpret (i.e., can be interpreted as a main effect) and centering variables removes high correlations between the random intercepts and slopes, as well as first and second level variables (Kreft & Leeuw, 1998). Grand-mean centering does not change the interpretation of the slopes.

Table 4

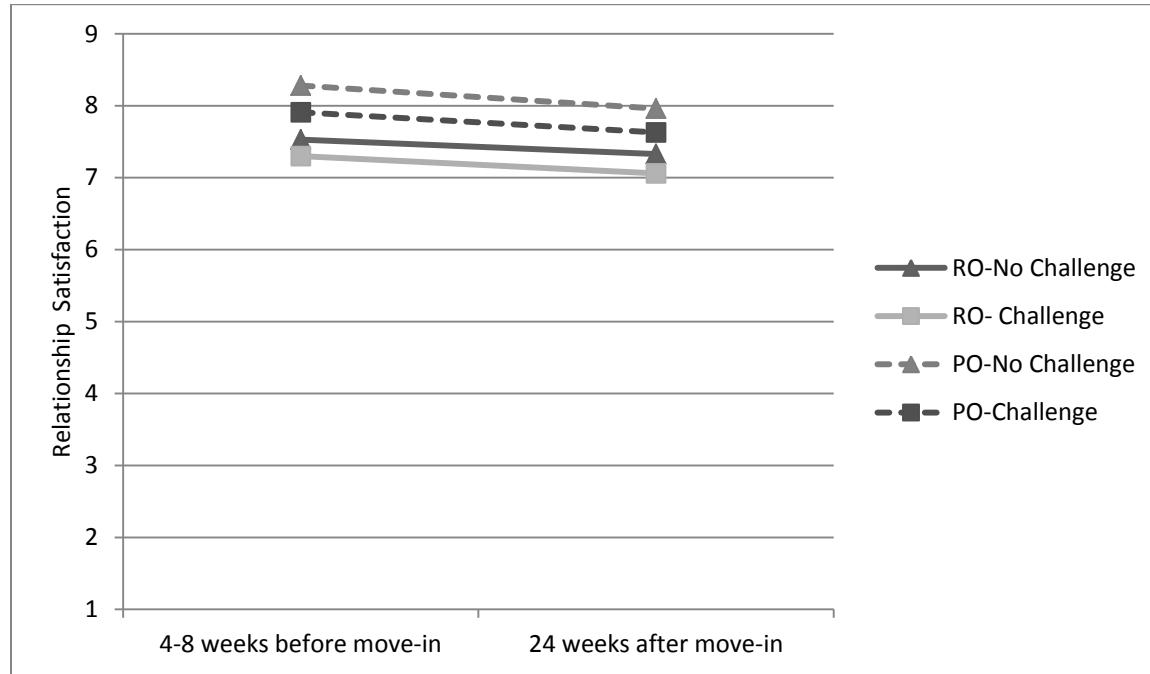
*Multilevel modeling effects of orientation and challenges on relationship satisfaction*

	B	SE	t	p
<b>Intercept</b>				
Constant <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>00</sub> )	7.61	.09	86.06	< .001
Orientation <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>01</sub> )	-.15	.04	-3.55	< .001
Challenge <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>02</sub> )	-.17	.32	-0.51	.61
Orientation <sub>t</sub> x Challenge <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>03</sub> )	.01	.13	0.11	.92
<b>Slope</b>				
Time <sub>i</sub> (B <sub>10</sub> )	-.13	.05	-2.50	.01
Orientation <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>11</sub> )	.01	.02	0.44	.66
Challenge <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>12</sub> )	-.002	.14	-0.02	.99
Orientation X Challenge <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>13</sub> )	-.004	.04	-0.09	.93

Subscript *i* indicates that the predictor is a level 1 (within person) variable, *t* indicates that the predictor is a level 2 (between person) variable. Degrees of freedom for level 1 effects are 148, and for level 2 *df* = 274.

Even though the effect of Orientation by Challenge on the time slope was not significant, I nevertheless examined whether under conditions of no expected challenges, the slope of relationship satisfaction over time was zero for both realistic and positively oriented participants, and whether satisfaction declined to a greater extent for positively oriented participants compared to realistically oriented participants under conditions of unexpected challenges. Preacher's online calculator was used to compute the simple slopes of the three-way interaction (Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006). Results did partially support the hypothesis such that when no challenges were reported relationship satisfaction declined slightly but not significantly for both positively ( $B = -.16$ ,  $SE = .53$ ,  $t = -0.30$ ,  $p = .77$ ) and realistically oriented participants ( $B = -.10$ ,  $SE = .54$ ,  $t = -0.19$ ,  $p = .85$ ). However, when challenges were encountered, there was a slight (although not significant) decline in relationship satisfaction was similar for both realistically

oriented participants ( $B = -.12$ ,  $SE = .55$ ,  $t = -0.21$ ,  $p = .83$ ) and positively oriented participants ( $B = -.14$ ,  $SE = .54$ ,  $t = -0.27$ ,  $p = .79$ ) (See Figure 7).



*Figure 7.* Interaction between unexpected challenges, orientation, and time predicting relationship satisfaction.

To test whether unmet expectations had a more negative effect on relationship satisfaction for positively oriented participants than for realistically oriented participants, I constructed a similar multilevel model such that relationship satisfaction at time<sub>i</sub> was regressed on time (at level 1; i.e., within person change), orientation, unmet expectations, and their interaction (at level 2; i.e., between persons). As noted earlier, unmet expectations was assessed as the difference between one's expectations (prior to cohabitation) about how cohabitating would change the relationship and one's assessment at Time 2 (approximately 12 weeks after moving in together) of how cohabitation had changed the relationship. I had hypothesized that when expectations were met, satisfaction with the relationship would be maintained from pre-cohabitation to post-moving in. However, when expectations were unmet, positively oriented

participants would report a greater decline in relationship satisfaction than would realistically oriented participants. As with the prior analysis, the effect of interest is the interaction of orientation by unmet expectation on the slope of time (i.e., the three-way interaction of orientation, unmet expectations, and time;  $B_{13}$  in the equation below). As with the previous models, time, orientation, unmet expectations, and the interaction of orientation with unmet expectations were grand mean centered.

*Level 1:*

$$\text{Relationship Satisfaction}_{it} = \pi_{0i} + \pi_{1i}(\text{time}_{it}) + e_{it}$$

*Level 2:*

$$\pi_0 = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01}(\text{orientation}_t) + \beta_{02}(\text{unmet expectations}_t) + \beta_{03}(\text{orientation}_t * \text{unmet expectations}_t) + r_0$$

$$\pi_1 = \beta_{10} + \beta_{11}(\text{orientation}_t) + \beta_{12}(\text{unmet expectations}_t) + \beta_{13}(\text{orientation}_t * \text{unmet expectations}_t) + r_1$$

Results showed a significant main effect of orientation where those who are realistically oriented report lower levels of relationship satisfaction than those who are positively oriented ( $B = -.15$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $t = -3.35$ ,  $p = .001$ ). There was also a main effect of unmet expectations where unmet expectations were related to lower levels of relationship satisfaction ( $B = -.13$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t = -1.99$ ,  $p = .05$ ). Time was also a significant predictor where relationship satisfaction declined from pre-cohabitation to 24 months post-move in ( $B = -.13$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t = -2.56$ ,  $p = .01$ ). There was also a marginally significant time by unmet expectations interaction ( $B = -.11$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $t = -1.86$ ,  $p = .07$ ).

Table 5

*Multilevel modeling effects of orientation and unmet expectations on relationship satisfaction*

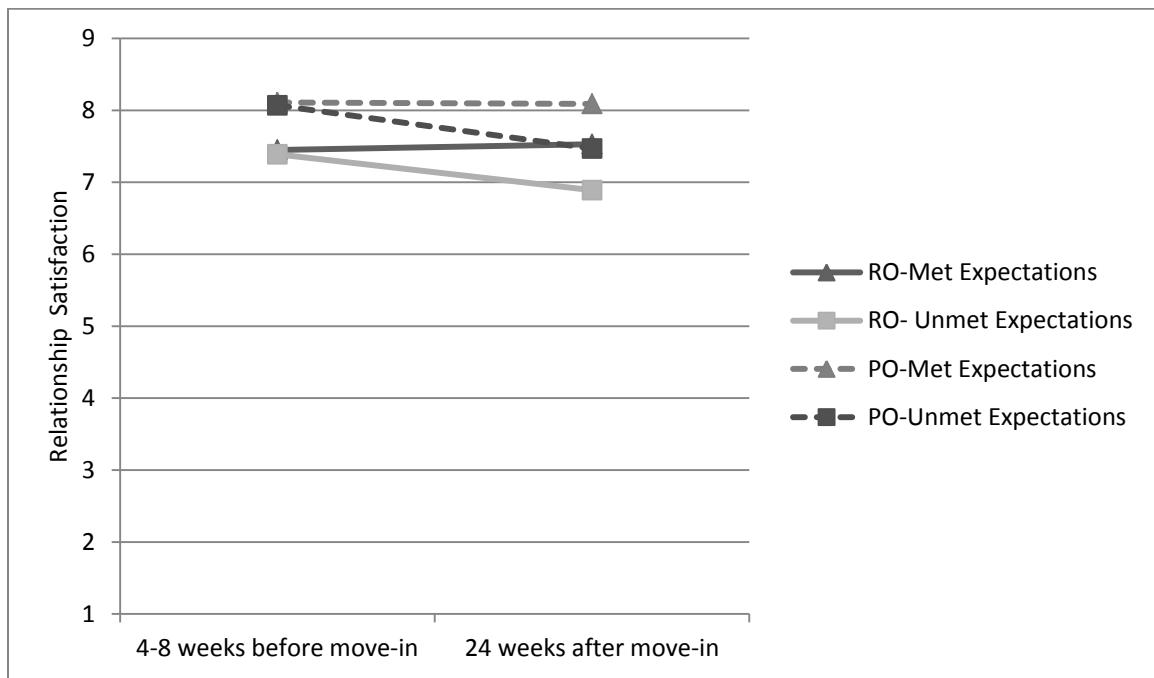
	B	SE	t	p
<b>Intercept</b>				
Constant <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>00</sub> )	7.61	.08	90.48	< .001
Orientation <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>01</sub> )	-.15	.04	-3.35	.001
Unmet Expectations <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>02</sub> )	-.13	.07	-1.99	.05
Orientation <sub>t</sub> x Unmet Expectations <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>03</sub> )	-.01	.03	-0.05	.96
<b>Slope</b>				
Time <sub>i</sub> (B <sub>10</sub> )	-.13	.05	-2.56	.01
Orientation <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>11</sub> )	.01	.02	0.52	.61
Unmet Expectations <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>12</sub> )	-.11	.06	-1.86	.07
Orientation <sub>t</sub> X Unmet Expectations <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>13</sub> )	-.0001	.02	-0.003	1.00

Subscript *i* indicates that the predictor is a level 1 (within person) variable, *t* indicates that the predictor is a level 2 (between person) variable. Degrees of freedom for level 1 effects are 149, and for level 2 *df* = 275.

Although the effect of orientation by unmet expectations on the time slope was not significant, I still examined if when expectations were met, the slope of relationship satisfaction over time was zero for both realistic and positively oriented participants, and whether when expectations were unmet relationship satisfaction significantly declined for positively oriented participants but not realistically oriented participants. To test the hypothesis, Preacher's online calculator was used to compute the simple slopes of the three-way interaction (Preacher et al., 2006).<sup>18</sup> The findings support the hypothesis such that when expectations are met those who are positively oriented ( $B = -.01$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t = 0.40$ ,  $p = .88$ ) and those who are realistically oriented ( $B = .04$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $t = 0.40$ ,  $p = .69$ ) report stable levels (i.e., no decrease) of relationship satisfaction over time. When expectations are unmet those who are realistically oriented continue

<sup>18</sup> -1 SD = -1.31 indicating that expectations were met/exceeded; +1 SD = 1.31 indicating expectations were not met

to report stable levels of relationship satisfaction over time ( $B = -.25$ ,  $SE = .18$ ,  $t = -1.39$ ,  $p = .17$ ) and those who are positively oriented experience a decrease in relationship satisfaction ( $B = -.30$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $t = -3.02$ ,  $p = .003$ ). The findings are represented in Figure 8. Given that the three way interaction was not significant and the standard error was substantially larger for those who are realistically oriented compared to those who are positively oriented I calculated whether the two slopes were significantly different from one another.<sup>19</sup> The results showed that the slopes between those who are realistically oriented and those who are positively oriented did not significantly differ ( $Z_{\text{score}} = -1.28$ ,  $p = .09$ ).



*Figure 8.* Interaction between unmet expectations, orientation, and time predicting relationship satisfaction.

Next, to assess whether the relation between unexpected challenges and change in commitment over time differed depending on one's orientation, again an HLM model was

<sup>19</sup>

$$Z = \frac{B_1 - B_2}{\sqrt{SE_{B1}^2 + SE_{B2}^2}}$$

created. I constructed a multilevel model where commitment at time<sub>i</sub> was regressed on time (at level 1; i.e., within person change), gender, orientation, unexpected challenges, and the orientation by unexpected challenges interaction (at level 2; i.e., between persons). I had hypothesized that under when no unexpected challenges were reported, the slope for commitment would be stable (i.e., no change) for both positively and realistically oriented individuals, but when unexpected challenges were reported, those who were positively oriented would tend to report a decline in commitment whereas those who were realistically oriented would report no decline in commitment. As with the prior analysis, the key effect of interest is the interaction of orientation by challenges on the slope of time (i.e., the three-way interaction of orientation, challenge, and time; B<sub>13</sub> in the equation below). In this model, gender, time, orientation, and challenges are grand mean centered. Gender was included as a control because men and women were found to differ on commitment.

*Level 1:*

$$\text{Commitment}_{it} = \pi_{0i} + \pi_{1i}(\text{time}_{it}) + e_{it}$$

*Level 2:*

$$\pi_0 = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01}(\text{orientation}_t) + \beta_{02}(\text{challenges}_t) + \beta_{03}(\text{orientation}_t * \text{challenges}_t) + \beta_{04}(\text{gender}_t) + r_0$$

$$\pi_1 = \beta_{10} + \beta_{11}(\text{orientation}_t) + \beta_{12}(\text{challenges}_t) + \beta_{13}(\text{orientation}_t * \text{challenges}_t) + r_1$$

The analysis indicated a main effect of gender where commitment levels were higher for woman than for men ( $B = .36$ ,  $SE = .18$ ,  $t = 1.99$ ,  $p = .05$ ). There was also a main effect of orientation where those who were realistically oriented had lower levels of commitment than those who were positively oriented ( $B = -.19$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $t = -4.880$ ,  $p < .001$ ). There was no effect of time and none of the variables predicted change in time (i.e., the slope; see Table 6 for results).

Table 6

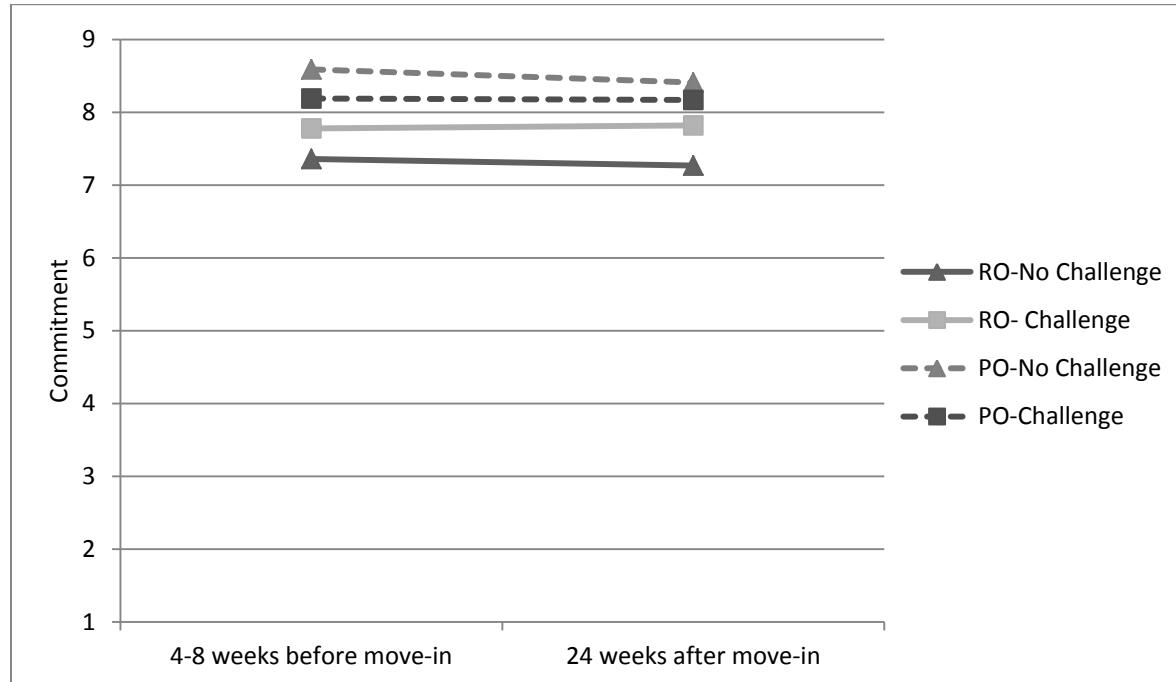
*Multilevel modeling effects of orientation and challenges on commitment*

	B	SE	t	p
<b>Intercept</b>				
Constant <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>00</sub> )	7.93	.09	92.51	< .001
Orientation <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>01</sub> )	-.19	.04	-4.88	< .001
Challenge <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>02</sub> )	.06	.25	0.22	.83
Orientation <sub>t</sub> x Challenge <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>03</sub> )	.11	.12	0.88	.38
Gender <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>04</sub> )	.36	.18	1.99	.05
<b>Slope</b>				
Time <sub>i</sub> (B <sub>10</sub> )	-.03	.04	-0.61	.54
Orientation <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>11</sub> )	.01	.02	0.50	.62
Challenge <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>12</sub> )	.04	.09	0.52	.60
Orientation <sub>t</sub> X Challenge <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>13</sub> )	-.001	.03	-0.26	.80

Subscript  $i$  indicates that the predictor is a level 1 (within person) variable,  $t$  indicates that the predictor is a level 2 (between person) variable. Degrees of freedom for level 1 effects are 147, and for level 2  $df = 274$ .

Although the effect of the orientation by challenge interaction on the time slope was not significant, I still examined whether when no unexpected challenges were reported, the slope of commitment over time would be zero for both realistic and positively oriented participants, and whether commitment significantly declined for positively but not realistically oriented participants when unexpected challenges were reported. To test the hypothesis Preacher's online calculator was used to compute the simple slopes of the three-way interaction (Preacher et al., 2006). Again, results did partially support the hypothesis such that when no challenges were reported relationship commitment was stable for both positively ( $B = -.09$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $t = -0.97$ ,  $p = .33$ ) and realistically oriented participants ( $B = -.04$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $t = -0.52$ ,  $p = .60$ ). Additionally, when challenges were reported realistically oriented participants did remain stable ( $B = .02$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $t = .22$ ,  $p = .83$ ).

.16,  $t = 0.15, p = .88$ ); however, positively oriented participants did not report a decrease in commitment ( $B = -.01, SE = .13, t = -0.11, p = .91$ ; See Figure 9).



*Figure 9.* Interaction between unexpected challenges, orientation, and time predicting commitment.

Last, to test whether unmet expectations had a more negative effect on commitment for positively oriented participants than for realistically oriented participants, I constructed a multilevel model such that commitment at time<sub>i</sub> was regressed on time (at level 1; i.e., within person change), gender, orientation, unmet expectations, and the orientation by unmet expectations interaction (at level 2; i.e., between persons). I had hypothesized that when expectations were met, commitment would be stable (i.e., no change) from pre-cohabitation to post move-in for both positively and realistically oriented participants. However, when expectations were unmet, I expected positively oriented participants would report a greater decline in commitment than would realistically oriented participants. As with each prior analysis, the effect of interest is the interaction of orientation by unmet expectations on the slope of time

(i.e., the three-way interaction of orientation, unmet expectations, and time;  $B_{13}$  in the equation below). As with the previous models, gender time, orientation, unmet expectations, and the interaction of orientation and unmet expectations were grand mean centered. Gender was included as a control because men and women were found to differ on commitment.

*Level 1:*

$$\text{Commitment}_{it} = \pi_{0i} + \pi_{1i}(\text{time}_{it}) + e_{it}$$

*Level 2:*

$$\pi_0 = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01}(\text{orientation}_t) + \beta_{02}(\text{unmet expectations}_t) + \beta_{03}(\text{orientation}_t * \text{unmet expectations}_t) + \beta_{04}(\text{gender}_t) + r_0$$

$$\pi_1 = \beta_{10} + \beta_{11}(\text{orientation}_t) + \beta_{12}(\text{unmet expectations}_t) + \beta_{13}(\text{orientation}_t * \text{unmet expectations}_t) + r_1$$

There was a main effect of gender such that women had higher scores on commitment than men ( $B = .36, SE = .18, t = 2.03, p = .04$ ). There was also a main effect of orientation such that realistically oriented participants were lower on commitment than positively oriented participants ( $B = -.20, SE = .04, t = -4.83, p < .001$ ). There was a marginally significant interaction between orientation and time ( $B = .04, SE = .02, t = 1.82, p = .07$ ) as well as a marginally significant interaction between unmet expectations and time ( $B = -.08, SE = .04, t = -1.82, p = .07$ ). The three way interaction between orientation, unmet expectations, and time was also marginally significant ( $B = -.03, SE = .02, t = -1.90, p = .06$ ).

Table 7

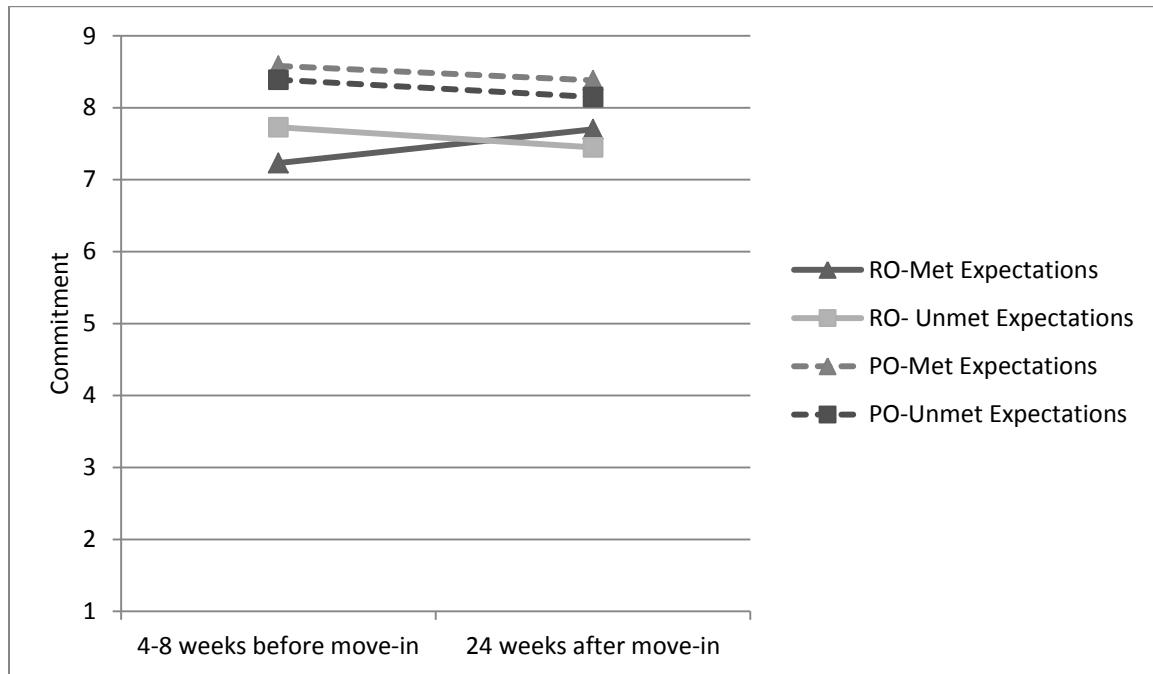
*Multilevel modeling effects of orientation and unmet expectations on commitment*

	B	SE	t	p
<b>Intercept</b>				
Constant <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>00</sub> )	7.93	.09	92.71	< .001
Orientation <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>01</sub> )	-.20	.04	-4.83	< .001
Unmet Expectations <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>02</sub> )	-.01	.087	-0.16	.87
Orientation <sub>t</sub> x Unmet Expectations <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>03</sub> )	.03	.03	0.90	.37
Gender <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>04</sub> )	.36	.18	2.03	.04
<b>Slope</b>				
Time <sub>i</sub> (B <sub>10</sub> )	-.03	.04	-0.65	.52
Orientation <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>11</sub> )	.04	.02	1.82	.07
Unmet Expectations <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>12</sub> )	-.08	.04	-1.82	.07
Orientation <sub>t</sub> X Unmet Expectations <sub>t</sub> (B <sub>13</sub> )	-.03	.02	-1.90	.06

Subscript *i* indicates that the predictor is a level 1 (within person) variable, *t* indicates that the predictor is a level 2 (between person) variable. Degrees of freedom for level 1 effects are 148, and for level 2 *df* = 275.

Even though the effect of orientation by unmet expectations on the time slope was only marginally significant, I still examined if when expectations were met, the slope of commitment over time was stable (i.e., zero) for both realistic and positively oriented participants, and when expectations were unmet whether commitment significantly declined for positively oriented participants but not realistically oriented participants. To test this hypothesis Preacher's online calculator was used to compute the simple slopes of the three-way interaction (Preacher et al., 2006). The hypothesis was not supported such that when expectations were met those who were realistically oriented reported an increase in commitment ( $B = .24$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $t = 2.61$ ,  $p = .01$ ), compared to positively oriented participants who reported no change in commitment ( $B = -.10$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t = -1.43$ ,  $p = .15$ ). When expectations were unmet both realistically ( $B = -.14$ ,  $SE =$

.13,  $t = -1.08, p = .28$ ) and positively oriented participants reported stable levels of commitment ( $B = -.12, SE = .07, t = -1.52, p = .13$ ).



*Figure 10.* Interaction between unmet expectations, orientation, and time predicting commitment.

Last, to test whether orientation, expectations for cohabitation, relationship satisfaction and commitment at Time 1 predicted whether a couple still lived together at Time 2 or Time 3 (includes those who have broken up as well as those who no longer cohabit) a logistic regression was conducted.<sup>20</sup> Age was also included as a control variable. Results found that orientation ( $B = .02, SE = .10, p = .84, Odds Ratio = 1.02$ ), expectations ( $B = -.11, SE = .23, p = .90, Odds Ratio = 0.90$ ), relationship satisfaction at Time 1 ( $B = -.16, SE = .24, p = .50, Odds Ratio = 0.85$ ), and commitment at Time 1 ( $B = -.08, SE = .21, p = .70, Odds Ratio = 0.92$ ) were

<sup>20</sup> Initially unmet expectations and the interaction between orientation and unmet expectations were also going to be included in the analysis; however, upon inspection of the data of the 14 participants who had either broken up with or were no longer cohabitating with their significant other, four of them had not completed Time 2 meaning they did not provide the data necessary to compute an unmet expectations score. Given this, it was determined with only 10 eligible incidences of non-cohabitation at Time 3 there would not be enough individuals per cell to also include the Time 2 variables. Expectations were included as an alternative for unmet expectations.

all non-significant predictors of whether a couple was still cohabitating or no longer together (i.e., no longer living together but still in a relationship or broken up). Age was a significant predictor of whether the couple was still cohabitating at 12 and 24 weeks ( $B = .07$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $p = .003$ , *Odds Ratio* = 1.07). With each yearly increase in age the individual was 1.07 times more likely to no longer be cohabitating with their significant other.

### **Study III and General Discussion**

The main purpose of this study was to assess whether a realistic orientation would be more adaptive than a positive orientation during a time of transition: moving in with a romantic partner. More specifically, the study aimed to identify whether having a realistic orientation would buffer the negative effects of unexpected challenges and unmet expectations on relationship satisfaction and commitment over time.

#### **Orientation**

Overall, the results did not support the supposition that a realistic orientation (RO) was more adaptive than a positive orientation (PO). Prior to moving in together, ROs reported having lower levels of both commitment and relationship satisfaction; a pattern that continued through to the follow-up. ROs set lower expectations for what cohabitation with their partner would be like, but despite these lower expectations, were no more likely than POs to have those expectations met. Finally, once living together, a realistic orientation did not buffer against the negative effects of unmet expectations or unexpected challenges on relationship satisfaction and commitment.

The finding that ROs report lower levels of commitment and relationship satisfaction compared to POs was unexpected as theoretically ROs are as hopeful and optimistic as POs. A closer look at some earlier findings may, however, shed some light on this finding. Although in

Study I ROs scored similarly to POs on hope, in Study II ROs scored lower on both hope and optimism compared to POs. In all three studies ROs scored higher on defensive pessimism, and more specifically, ROs scored higher than POs on the pessimism subscale. Additionally, in past research examining orientation and test-taking ROs were found to score lower than POs on an initial assessment of positive affect (Frank, 2012). Given this past finding combined with the current findings, it may be that ROs have a propensity to report more modestly on positive or desirable measures. As discussed in past research (Frank, 2012) it is not clear whether these ratings represent true differences in the outcomes (in this case commitment and relationship satisfaction) or whether the differences are due, at least in part, to response bias. In past research POs were found to score significantly higher on self-deceptive enhancement than ROs (Frank, 2012). Self-deceptive enhancement reflects a tendency to exaggerate (possibly unwittingly) desirable qualities. Given this, POs may be inclined to exaggerate how satisfying their relationship is and how committed they are to their partner (potential solutions discussed in limitations and future directions). It may be that ROs and POs experience similar levels of relationship satisfaction and commitment but report those experiences differently. In addition, it is worth noting that although those who are realistically oriented are reporting lower levels of commitment and less relationship satisfaction compared to those who are positively oriented, they are still reporting relatively high levels of both overall (ROs had mean estimates close to seven on the nine-point scale for both outcomes). Thus, even if ROs are not as satisfied or committed as their PO counterparts, they are still generally quite committed and satisfied given their average scores.

In addition to reporting lower levels of commitment and relationship satisfaction, results show that ROs also set lower expectations for cohabitating with their partner, but were only

equally likely of having those expectations met. It is interesting that despite having set higher expectations, POs had the same degree of met expectations as ROs. One explanation might lie in the strong body of work that has found higher expectations motivate people to exert a greater level of effort to meet those expectations (e.g. Feather, 1992; Locke, Saari, Shaw, & Latham, 1981; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). It may be that in relationships high expectations lead to more motivation to maintain relationship standards, and subsequently, more attempts at relationship maintenance. This increased motivation to meet high expectations may partially explain why POs were as likely to have their expectations met as ROs. That being said, the level of one's expectations (e.g., high or low), did not appear to predict relationship satisfaction or commitment; only unmet expectations was a significant predictor. Given that, it does not appear setting either high or low expectations for one's experience is problematic or maladaptive, but rather what is important is ensuring those expectations are met.

A realistic orientation also did not appear to act as a buffer against the negative effects of unmet expectations on commitment and relationship satisfaction. It was expected that by considering potential negative outcomes ROs would be protected against the various setbacks and challenges associated with cohabitating with one's partner, but the results do not suggest this to be the case. The three-way interaction between orientation, unmet expectations, and time was not significant, indicating the link between unmet expectations and relationship satisfaction over time did not vary as a function of orientation. However, examination of the simple slopes for the three-way interaction suggested that when expectations were met, both POs and ROs reported stable levels of relationship satisfaction over time, but when expectations were not met, high ROs continued to report stable levels of relationship satisfaction over time whereas POs reported a decrease in relationship satisfaction. This finding may be due to the standard error of the slope

for ROs with high unmet expectations being much larger than the standard errors for the other three groups. Since the standard error is used to compute the 95% confidence intervals around the slope an inflated standard error can lead to a Type II error where we conclude a significant slope is not significant (i.e., accept the null hypothesis). It is likely that this inflated standard error is the reason that the results indicated the slope was not significant (looking at Figure 8 the slope for ROs with high unmet expectations appears as though it should be significant ), especially given the fact that the interaction was not significant. Additionally, as mentioned in the results, further analysis of the differences between the two slopes indicated they were not significantly different from one another. Thus, although the simple slopes analysis for the three-way interaction suggests otherwise, it is likely both ROs and POs experience a decrease in relationship satisfaction when unmet expectations are high. This finding would suggest that neither a realistic orientation nor a positive orientation is adaptive in the face of unmet expectations.

Interestingly, orientation does appear to play a role in the link between unmet expectations and commitment, but not the one hypothesized. The findings suggest that when expectations are unmet ROs and POs both report no change in commitment over time, but when expectations are met where POs continued to report stable levels of commitment, ROs experienced an increase in commitment over time. It may be that because those who are realistically oriented tempered their expectations as to avoid disappointment, when their expectations are met or exceeded they may feel more confident committing more deeply to their partner. Logically, the advantage to this may be that ROs only deeply commit to partners who exceed their expectations. This may lead to stable, long-term relationship satisfaction.

Aside from ROs reporting an increase in commitment when unmet expectations are low, as a whole, the results do not provide evidence that RO is a more adaptive strategy during times of transition than PO. That being said, the findings do not necessarily suggest that adopting a realistic orientation is a maladaptive strategy, but that perhaps a realistic orientation is not as efficacious as previously thought. Generally, those who are realistically oriented and those who were positively oriented reported similar patterns of relationship satisfaction and commitment over time. In fact, aside from POs having higher levels of commitment and relationship satisfaction, the two strategies appear to be similar in their effectiveness. The results of the current study suggest that adopting either a realistic or a positive orientation may result in similar outcomes. This is a valuable finding in itself as past research has indicated that positive thinking results in the best outcomes (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992; Brown & Marshall, 2000; Solberg Ness & Segerstrom, 2006). These findings instead suggest that negative thoughts are not necessarily maladaptive. In fact, it appears that, in conjunction with positive thoughts, one can have negative thoughts about one's partner or relationship and still be satisfied and committed.

### **Unmet Expectations & Unexpected Challenges**

When examining the role of potential challenges associated with key relationship outcomes (i.e., relationship satisfaction and commitment), unmet expectations appear to play an important role where unexpected challenges do not. As predicted, unmet expectations proved to be an important modifier of relationship satisfaction over time; however, it did not predict a change in commitment over time. The findings show that when expectations are met, there is no change in relationship satisfaction over time (i.e., relationship satisfaction is stable); however, when expectations are not met relationship satisfaction declines over time. The finding that change in relationship satisfaction is not consistent across all individuals is in line with other

research that had found that while satisfaction tended to decline from pre- to post-marriage for some (or pre-cohabitation to post-move in), not all couples experienced this downward trend (Lucas et al., 2003; Whisman et al., 2008). Previous research had yet to identify which factor may moderate relationship satisfaction during times of transition within one's relationship; my findings suggest that unmet expectations may play a role. Past research that has examined the link between expectations and relationship satisfaction (but not in relation to individual differences in satisfaction over time) has found that when one's expectations are consistent with one's experiences in the relationship, one tends to report higher levels of relationship satisfaction (e.g., Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000). Other research has found that relationship dissatisfaction is correlated with disconfirmation of one's expectations (e.g., Dainton, 2000). Given these two lines of research in conjunction with my own findings, it appears that expectancy fulfillment is key in predicting relationship satisfaction over time and may be particularly important during times of transition.

Unexpected challenges on the other hand did not appear to play a role in changes in relationship satisfaction, nor did they play a role in changes in commitment over time. The results of the simple slopes analysis suggest that unexpected challenges associated with cohabitation are not strongly linked with changes in relationship satisfaction or commitment for POs or ROs. The result, in part, may be due to the low number of individuals who reported unexpected challenges associated with cohabitation. Only 20 participants (approximately 12%) of the sample reported experiencing any unexpected challenges (compared to 166 participants who reported no unexpected challenges). Given the low number of individuals who experienced unexpected challenges, the analysis was underpowered. Additionally, the low number of reported challenges may lead to less stable estimates of slopes.

### **Relationship Satisfaction & Commitment**

Looking at the trends of relationship satisfaction and commitment over time, the two variables did not show similar patterns of change and were not influenced by the same predictors despite being highly correlated in past research (e.g., Etcheverry, Le, Wu, & Weis, 2012). First, commitment had much less within-person variability compared to relationship satisfaction indicating that commitment fluctuates less over time. The pattern of findings provides support for past research that has found commitment to be relatively stable during times of transition (e.g., Rhoades et al., 2006). Commitment does not appear to be influenced by setbacks or unmet expectations in one's relationship at least in the short term (e.g., less than a year). Relationship satisfaction on the other hand was found to decline over time (and this decline was found to depend on the degree of unmet expectations). This finding is in line with other studies that have also found a decline in relationship satisfaction during times of transition (e.g., Rhoades et al., 2012). As mentioned, although commitment and relationship satisfaction have been strongly correlated in past research past (e.g., Etcheverry et al., 2012) they did not have the same patterns of change in the current analyses suggesting that, although correlated, the two variables have unique predictors of change. Relationship satisfaction appears to be more vulnerable to short-term stressors (e.g., setbacks associated with transitions) whereas commitment appears to be relatively immune to these stressors.

### **Breakups**

Last, orientation, relationship satisfaction and commitment at Time 1 were examined as potential predictors of whether a couple continued to cohabit with one another at Time 2 and Time 3. None of the factors significantly predicted breakups. Due to a low number of eligible breakups at Time 3 ( $n = 10$ ), I was unable to include potentially influential Time 2 variables in the analysis. In particular, change in satisfaction and commitment from Time 1 (pre-

cohabitation) to Time 2 (living together) and unmet expectations may have been significant predictors of whether a couple continues to cohabit. Past research has found that this time frame (e.g., the first 6 months) may be particularly predictive of long-term satisfaction and happiness (Lucas et al., 2003). In one study those who had a decline from 1-year pre-marriage to 1-year post-marriage were more likely to experience a long-term decrease in happiness (Lucas et al., 2003).

### **Future Directions/ Limitations**

Although whether one's expectations are met or not met appears important in the context of romantic relationships, less may be known about what predicts unmet expectations. As mentioned earlier, the level of expectations (i.e., whether expectations were high or low) did not appear linked to the degree to which those expectations were met indicating another factor may be involved. As hypothesized above, it may be that those who set higher expectations experience an increased motivation to exert efforts to meet those expectations, but it may also have to do with one's ability to meet those expectations. One recent study found that high expectations were linked positively to relationship satisfaction over time only in couples who had the ability to meet those expectations (McNulty, 2016). That is, in relationships with higher levels of destructive behaviours (e.g., indirect hostility) or where relationship problems (e.g., trust, showing affection) were rated as more severe, high expectations were linked to lower relationship satisfaction. Conversely, in relationships with lower levels of destructive behaviours and less severe relationship issues, high expectations were related to higher relationship satisfaction. The study did not examine however, the degree to which those expectations were met, thus future research should explore whether a couple's ability to meet the expectations set predicts unmet expectations over time.

As is often the case in this type of research, I rely on self-report data in order to gather information. Self-report always comes with the risk of inaccurate or dishonest responding. Self-reporting on aspects of one's relationship may be particularly vulnerable to "rose-tinted" responses. In fact, one study by MacDonald and Ross (1999) found that participants assessed their relationships more positively than two more objective observers (i.e., parents and roommates). Participants tended to focus on their relationship's strengths and make more optimistic predictions for their relationships than their roommates or parents; however, the two observer groups made more accurate predictions than the participants regarding the relationship's future. Since relationship satisfaction and commitment are predictors of relationship dissolution objective observers may also be more accurate at assessing relationship satisfaction and commitment (see Rusbult, 1980). Given this, it would be interesting to assess relationship satisfaction and commitment using both self-report and two additional observers (e.g., parent's and a close friend). This might help determine whether the differences in relationship satisfaction and commitment between ROs and POs are true differences or due to biased reporting.

In future research, it might also be beneficial to recruit both individuals from the partnership to participate in the study. By including both individuals in the couple and assessing the orientation and expectations of both we may get a closer look into the interplay of orientation and relationship outcomes (e.g., satisfaction and commitment) as well as unmet expectations and relationship outcomes. For example, we could explore whether individuals are more committed and more satisfied when they and their partner have the same orientation (e.g., both have a realistic orientation) compared to different orientations. We could also explore whether one's dissatisfaction stemming from unmet expectations predicts changes in the relationship

satisfaction of one's partner, or whether the decrease in relationship satisfaction over time is amplified if both individuals' expectations are not met. Including both partners would allow us to build a more complex model and gain a better understanding of how orientation and unmet expectations may interact to predict changes in relationship satisfaction and commitment over time.

One limitation of the study was the relatively low number of reported unexpected challenges associated with cohabitation reported by participants. Anecdotally one often hears of the challenges that accompany a friend's or colleague's transition into cohabitation with their partner; it is the topic of many articles in women's magazines (e.g., Cosmopolitan's "22 things you learn VERY quickly when you move in with a boy"; Cox, 2014). However, no research has assessed what and how many unexpected challenges are associated with cohabitating. The relatively low number of individuals who reported unexpected challenges ( $n = 20$ ; 12%) suggests that perhaps unexpected challenges are not as common as one may think. Alternatively, it may be that participants were not clear on what would qualify as a challenge. The prompt for the question did not give any examples of what would be classified as a challenge. It may be that participants did not conceptualize the small day-to-day setbacks as challenges and thus did not report accordingly. In future research examining setbacks in relationships it may be beneficial to give participants a range of examples to get more accurate responses.

Another limitation of the study is not knowing whether those who chose not to participate in Time 2 or Time 3 of the study were still currently with their partner or whether they had broken up. Although in the follow-up emails for Time 2 and Time 3 participants were told, "you do not have to still be romantically involved or living with your partner to complete this part of the study", there is a chance that they simply deleted the email upon seeing the 'orientation to

'cohabitation' subject heading. That being said, those who did not participate in Time 2 or Time 3 did not differ from those who did participate on any of the Time 1 variables of interest. In future research however, it may be better to simply avoid the study title in the email subject line and simply indicate that the invitation to participate is for a continuing study and include time requirements and compensation information. If participants are more likely to open the email and read the enclosed text we can be more confident that they simply chose not to participate and are not choosing not to participate because they are no longer in a romantic relationship.

An additional limitation was the small number of breakups at Time 2 ( $n = 21$ ) and Time 3 ( $n = 14$ ) which prevented the full hypothesized model from being run (i.e., change in relationship satisfaction and commitment from Time 1 to Time 2, unexpected challenges, and unmet expectations were not included in the model). The results did not identify any of the tested predictors as significant factors in whether a couple breaks-up, but it is possible that had there been a greater number of breakups at Time 3 and the full model had been run some (or all) of these variables may have played an important role in predicting whether a relationship dissolves or persists.

## **Conclusion**

As mentioned, people spend a considerable amount of time thinking about their future (Jason et al., 1989; Leary, 2004), and this process of anticipating the future is thought to be what allows individuals to better construct an understanding of what their future might hold (Kelly, 1955). Past research had suggested that those who do not give thought to possible negative outcomes (e.g., challenges or disappointments) may struggle or have difficulty when problems arise (e.g., Perloff, 1983; Scheppelle & Bart, 1983; Sewell, 2003). Stated another way, without considering a 'Plan B', individuals may be disheartened and discouraged when 'Plan A' does not succeed. Given this, it was thought that possessing a realistic orientation, where one considered both

positive and negative possibilities, would be adaptive in that one would have the protective aspect of considering a ‘Plan B’, with the benefits of expecting ‘Plan A’ to succeed. It was thought that a realistic orientation combined the benefits of optimism (hoping for the best) and defensive pessimism (planning for the worst; reflecting on possible challenges), resulting in an optimal strategy. The cornerstone of the realistic orientation research provided evidence that this might indeed be the case (Churchill & Davis, 2010). The study found in a sample of first time mothers that those who had a realistic orientation showed a decrease in depressive symptoms from pre- to post-partum whereas positively and negatively oriented women did not. When the transition was accompanied by unexpected challenges, realistically oriented individuals continued to experience this decrease in depressive symptoms, whereas positively oriented individuals experienced an increase in depressive symptoms. Although the findings provided support for the theory that a realistic orientation was adaptive, particularly in the face of challenge, subsequent studies have failed to replicate this finding.

Throughout my graduate studies I have conducted several studies examining the effectiveness of orientation in varying domains. I examined whether those who were realistically oriented would: perform better on a series of tasks following failure feedback because they had considered the possibility of failure beforehand; set more accurate spending budgets because they considered the possibility of going over budget; and enjoyed their vacation more because they had considered the possibility that they may encounter some difficulties while away (e.g., lost luggage). In all but one instance<sup>21</sup> the results indicated that a realistic orientation was only as adaptive as a positive orientation. After these studies failed to replicate the initial findings I considered whether context was perhaps particularly important for the effectiveness of a realistic

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<sup>21</sup> We had four sessions of data collection due to low enrolment in the vacation study. Only with one set of results did we find the pattern expected; others showed no effect of orientation.

orientation. Parenthood is a transition that is viewed as highly positive and rewarding but with many setbacks and unique challenges; it is likened anecdotally to a rollercoaster. Cohabitation was selected as a similar situation where moving in with one's partner generally is regarded as a positive experience, but one that also comes with the challenge of merging one's life with another person. Unfortunately, once again I was unable to replicate the findings of the initial study. The inability to replicate the results may be due to the notion that parenthood is a unique transformative experience for which a comparable situation may not exist. It may be that a realistic orientation is only adaptive in this particular type of situation (one that has extreme ups and downs).

Although the studies failed to provide support for the supposition that a realistic orientation is more adaptive than a positive orientation, the findings do suggest that the two strategies may be similarly adaptive. This in itself is an important finding as it provides evidence to support the idea that the process of anticipating negative outcomes is not maladaptive. Instead the findings suggest that coupled with positive anticipations, negative anticipations can be adaptive. That is, one does not need to simply focus on the positive aspects of one's relationship to be committed and satisfied. One can consider the possibility of disappointments, conflicts, and potentially even breakups without distancing oneself from the relationship or becoming dissatisfied. This finding adds to the body of literature that outlines the adaptability of considering negative outcomes (e.g. Norem, & Illingworth, 1993; Norem, & Illingworth, 2004; Norem, 2000).

Moving forward however, it seems important to shift our perception of a realistic orientation to attempt to better capture the construct. Currently, a realistic orientation is conceptualized by the frequency of positive and negative thoughts, but the depth of those thoughts or the probability of the anticipations is not assessed. It may be valuable to start to also consider the

weight of probability when looking at anticipations. It may be that there are individuals with a realistic orientation who would weight all the positive possibilities as more likely and all of the negative possibilities as less likely; where another individual with a realistic orientation categorizes a mix of positive and negative possibilities as equally likely. Both may frequently think about positive and negative outcomes, but with a key difference which may influence the outcome. It may be that considering potential challenges, but also determining that they are very unlikely to happen, still results in being unprepared if those outcomes do occur. That is to say, if a negative outcome is perceived as having a low probability of occurring one may not attempt to buffer against or prepare for that possibility leaving one equally as shocked as a positively oriented individual when it occurs. Thus, it may not be enough to ask participants how often they think of a particular outcome or possibility but also ask them to indicate how likely they think that possibility is. Alternatively, the complexity or depth of the anticipation may also be important. Where one individual may think frequently but fleetingly of potential negative outcomes another individual may only sometimes think of the same potential negative outcome, but do so in great detail. Currently, we do not know how correlated frequency of anticipations and depth of anticipations are. It may be that the more frequently one gives thought to an outcome the more deeply one also considers that outcome, but this may not be the case. Before conducting additional research on the adaptiveness of a realistic orientation it is important to address these issues. Findings may lead to a multifaceted measurement approach to assessing a realistic orientation which may shed light on the true role of orientation in the face of challenges and setbacks.

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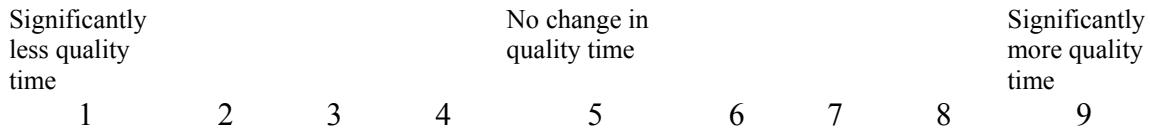
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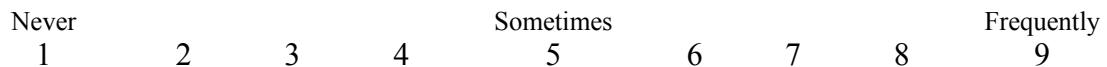
## Appendix A

### Expectations for cohabitation

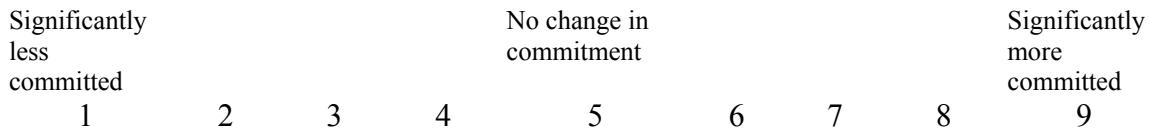
1. When you are your partner move in together, how much quality time do you expect you will spend together compared to the quality time you spend together now?



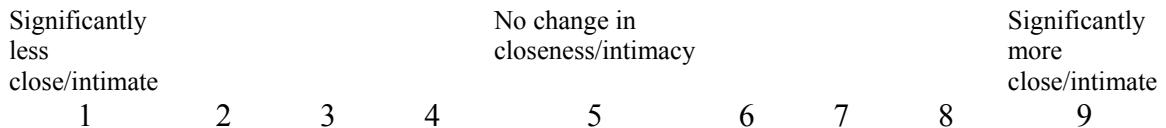
2. When you move in with your partner, how often will you and your partner try new, fun activities together?



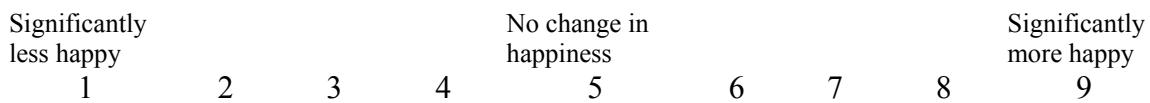
3. Relative to how committed you feel towards your partner now, how committed do you expect to feel after you move in together?



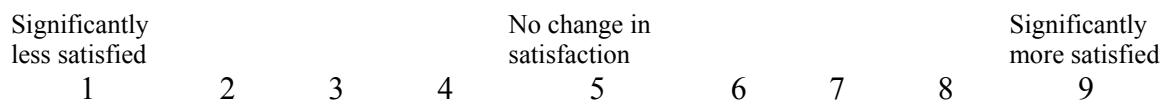
4. Relative to how close/intimate you feel to your partner now, how close/intimate do you expect to feel after you move in together?



5. Relative to how happy you currently are in your relationship with your partner, how happy do you expect to feel after you move in together?



6. Relative to how satisfied you currently are in your relationship with your partner, how satisfied do you expect to feel after you move in together?



## Appendix B

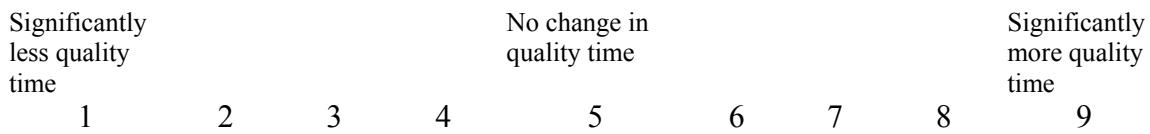
### **Experiences in cohabitation**

1. Did you experience any unexpected challenges living with your partner?

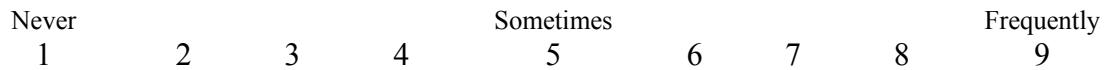
Yes      or      No

2. If yes, what were those challenges?

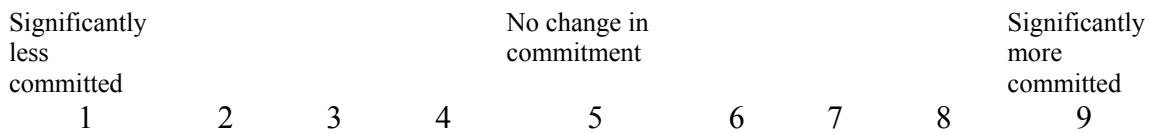
3. Compared to before living together how much quality time do you and your partner spend together?



4. How often do you and your partner try new, fun activities together?



5. Relative to how committed you felt towards your partner before moving in together, how committed do you feel now?



6. Relative to how close/intimate you felt with your partner before moving in together, how close/intimate do you feel now?

